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A Phenomenological Approach to Women, Craft, and Knowledge: The Embodied Embroiderer in India

BY

MICHELE A. HARDY ©

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

IN

CLOTHING AND TEXTILES

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

Spring, 1995

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DR SANDRA NIESSEN

DR MARLENE COX-BISHOP

DR JEAN DeBERNARDI

January 13, 1995

This thesis is dedicated to my Mother and Father who have unfailingly supported my dreams and aspirations. Their love and belief in me are the foundations of my thought and work-- the sources of my creativity.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how and why hand embroidery has been dismissed by patriarchal ideologies. Drawing on my experience as a textile craftsperson and my observations of embroiderers in India I claim that embroidery is culturally significant and that embroiderers are knowledgeable. I examine several bodies of literature for their impact on embroidery research, drawing theoretical and methodological inspiration from anthropology, feminist theory, aesthetics, philosophy, and art history. While developing a theoretical framework for the study of embroidery is beyond the aims of this thesis, the craft perspective I initiate lays the groundwork. The craft perspective is of particular relevance for the study of crafts, particularly embroidery, as it embraces gesture, function, and meaning. It marries the aims of anthropology and feminist intersubjective research with an embodied, experiential approach. This, I argue, is better suited to elicit the tacit, non-verbal knowledge often associated with women and embroidery.

PREFACE

My passion for textiles has been lifelong. I can recount my history in terms of beautiful textiles and learning their techniques. However two encounters were responsible for making me aware that textiles have significance beyond the strictly utilitarian or decorative. The first resulted from reading and listening to other craftspeople and wondering, rather vaguely, how others continue to work, continue to live by their work-- how, for example, do other textiles artists cope with a market and value system which place such a high premium on paintings rather than weavings? One strategy has been to adopt the form and apparent intent of the recognized 'fine arts'-- cloth has been framed, spotlit, and labelled in galleries in an attempt to appropriate some of the prestige enjoyed by fine art. Some women artists in the 1970's (eg. Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro) explored 'feminist aesthetics' often using textiles or appropriating textile imagery to symbolize women's shared oppression. While they encouraged an awareness of the beauty and integrity of women's work, especially textiles, they did little to challenge a system which still ranked what could be hung in a gallery more highly than what could be draped over a bed or altar.

The second encounter came sometime after art school when my questions of personal and artistic worth were intense. This encounter I hold responsible for encouraging me to choose anthropology rather than art history when I returned to university. In the introduction to his remarkable book Baskets as Textile Art (1973), Rossbach wrote:

> In searching for information about baskets I discovered that little attention has been paid them. I began to feel that they were being slighted. (Rossbach, 1973, p.8).

Rossbach relates a brief history of perceptions of basketry in this century-- one which mirrors the history of embroidery for reasons I will explore in chapters 2, 3, and, 4. He

notes that from the end of the nineteenth century, North American Indian baskets were promoted as "art" while basketmaking among non-natives was promoted as a hobby. Among the general public, however,

> the lingering effect of the emphasis on basketmaking was the association of the craft with summer camps and merit badges, and with therapy in mental institutions. Finally, the word basket-making was used to describe any non-intellectual manual performance, any sort of foolish busywork (Rossbach, 1973, p.10).

Rossbach struck a chord. I identified with his expression of frustration and marginality.

More important, however, was his suggestion that there was something more, something that had been missed. He impressed me with his arguments for the integrity and value of baskets and suggestion that they are instances of creative ingenuity. While clearly moved by the beauty of baskets as objects, his discussion pushes beyond their mere appearance and technique. He discusses their process, how they result from an interaction with nature, their economy or extravagance of means, and their situated histories-- factors suggesting intrinsic **meaning**. Discussing his introduction to basketmaking Rossbach notes that

> through watching an Aleut basketmaker at work I became aware, most of all, that the traditional process requires time and a stable existence, one season to the next, and a general sense of the appropriateness of the activity to the total life. Certain grasses at certain times of the year, selected and sorted according to certain standards, worked at certain seasons in certain moist atmospheres according to certain techniques, into certain forms with certain decorations, for certain purposes (Rossbach, 1973, p.8).

My questions were reformulated after reading Rossbach and subsequently studying anthropology. I began to see that individual crafts persons' strategies for producing meaningful textiles are negotiated within the cultures of which they are a part. Therefore, the reasons why textiles and other crafts are celebrated (or not) are cultural. I began to wonder how it is that hand woven or embellished textiles in cultures other than my own (Euro-American) continue to be made, continue to be used and appreciated as

textiles-- not as symbols, not as fine art, not even as craft. I wondered how that meaning is negotiated and why it persists despite the modernization that seems to have so radically changed the meaning of cloth in the West.

This discussion illustrates the development of my approach to the study of textiles. My interests shifted from the study of an object in relation to an individual to the meaning of the object and its context. This shift does not exclude individuals, but examines them in a different light. Nochlin (1971) has challenged the idea that the artist is a superendowed genius who stands outside of culture. Similarly I examine the role of textiles and their makers-- not as semantically given entities (eg. artists) but as functioning members, embedded in culture. Moreover textiles are not the ends of my study, but the means-- **it is through examining textiles and their relationship to individuals and groups that I can begin to understand their significance or meaning** and, to return in spirit to my initial query, their perseverance.

I am most interested in embroidered textiles for reasons both personal and academic. Though hardly an embroiderer in the traditional sense, my creative relationship with cloth is more closely allied with embroidery than with woven or printed textiles. It is the embroidery of Western India and particularly that of Kutch (see Maps #1 and #2) which has captured my imagination. Aesthetically, these textiles are vibrant, playful, and rich, technically, materially, and iconographically. They are, moreover, iconologically rich though this has not yet been explored. They are a tantalizing mystery whose richness and potency are seemingly at odds with the economic poverty of their makers.

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Chapter 1
Embroidery: Refined and Defined

Introduction

A theoretical framework for the study of embroidery that is consonant with current feminist and anthropological theories has not yet been developed. In this thesis I examine how hand embroidery has been approached ideologically by European and North American scholars. I probe beyond the physical appearance of the embroidered object to reveal the ideas and theories which have implicitly or explicitly shaped how embroidery is understood and valued in the West-- understanding which has influenced the study of the embroidery of other cultures. I draw on my observations and readings of the traditions of hand embroidery in Western India to counterpoint the exclusivity of these existing approaches to embroidery. The literature on the embroidery of Western India, for example, continues to be largely descriptive with little attention paid to the cultural significance of embroidery. This approach, I argue, is an intellectual heir of Kantian aesthetics as interpreted by Western art history and supported by Western science and philosophy. Consequently, this intellectual history must be revisited if a theoretical framework for the study of embroidery is to be developed. Developing such a framework is beyond the aim of this thesis; I limit myself to determining what has prevented embroidery from more thorough scholarly inquiry. I propose the '**craft perspective**' as an approach of particular relevance and advantage to the study of hand produced objects including embroidery.

I begin this thesis by probing what embroidery is and how a more holistic understanding of it may revise approaches to its study. Where factors including context, gender, function, and meaning have influenced the study of other ethnographic textiles, as I will demonstrate shortly, the study of embroidery has yet to consistently benefit from a more comprehensive approach. Another factor which is particularly significant to the

Figure 1. Contemporary phulkari embroiderer in Patiala, Punjab.

study of embroidery and which is central to my craft perspective is recognition of the significance of the process or gesture of production. This has been addressed, to a limited extent, by scholars who have examined the ritual and symbolic aspects of weaving techniques and equipment (Messick, 1987; Dilley, 1987). Requiring few tools or specific skills, Indian hand embroidery production has been discussed only with respect to the classification of stitch types. I argue that analysis which acknowledges the process and gesture of embroidery stands to reveal its significance as something more than "foolish busywork." Encompassing process or the experiential within the study of hand embroidery is particularly suitable given that embroidery skill is largely tacit and experiential, and that its practitioners are most often women whose knowledge is discounted by patriarchy. In India, women's embroidery may be produced in accordance with normative, patriarchal aesthetics. An experiential approach to production may reveal alternative interpretations-- even subordinate discourses (Messick, 1987).

The impetus behind the development of feminism in the 1960's and 1970's was women's growing awareness of their omission from the canons of art history, science and philosophy. Mirroring this, my personal experience of marginality as a woman and a textile craftsperson encouraged my research and reflection on the status of art and craft from a feminist perspective.

The difference between art and craft has traditionally been art's cognitive transcendence of material and function. Craft remains tied to necessity and tied to the 'maker's hand,' as opposed to the maker's intellect (Hardy, 1994). The artist is credible because he[1] transcends the particularities of materiality and discovers truth within himself. The craftsperson cannot claim the same transcendence and is consequently denied status. Craft is therefore a marginalized, trivialized enterprise, more often connected with an extinct pre-industrial past than the present. Embroidery is a craft which has suffered accordingly. It is stubbornly hand produced with a minimum of tools

or equipment. Its technical skills are ostensibly simple, hidden from public scrutiny in the home, hidden from words through tacit, experiential knowledge and instruction based on example. Its skills are trivialized by pattern books and how-to manuals which attempt to quantify it as a series of ordered, logical steps to be copied (Markrich, 1976).

As the 'international' style has taken over the craft world, crafts which are original, expressive and attributable to an individual-- in other words, art-like-- are valued higher than those considered 'traditional.' Art-like crafts are, moreover, free standing (presumably on pedestals in galleries) and of relatively permanent materials. Modernism has eroded the power 'representation' once held to determine what counted as art-- subsequently, content, expression, and form dominate discussions of art and art-like craft. Contemporary Western craft often mocks or disdains its functionality, denying its historical roots. A cup, for example, need no longer just be a (functional) cup, but a statement about cup-ness and function, a satirical comment on a cup that may or may not function. Embroidery has suffered from, on the one hand, not being art-like enough despite attempts to justify it as such. On the other hand, it has also suffered in a sense from being too art-like-- for not involving complex machines and tools, from being a holistic rather than prescriptive technology (see Franklin, 1990a).

Parker (1984) illustrates these ambivalent attitudes towards embroidery. Its slow, singular, portable production is antithetical to the aims and ideology surrounding the development of capitalist industrial production in the nineteenth century. It is consequently old fashioned, a relic, a "survival" to use Tylor's term.[2] This ambivalence is manifested by its increasing association with women amateur embroiderers who walk, or rather stitch, a fine line between morality (embroidery as work) and lasciviousness (embroidery as self indulgence) (Stone-Ferrier, 1991). This ambivalence continues to influence the perception and status of embroidery within the crafts today. Embroidery scholars and practitioners demand "parity" with other contemporary crafts. They

encourage the development of a language to access and evaluate embroidery (Theophilus, 1992), though the basis upon which this criticism should rest has not yet been established.

Key to an understanding of embroidery is its intimate association with women--an association that is difficult to define but is persistent and pervasive. This association, intersecting with preferences for objectivity, is partially responsible for the low status of embroidery and the superficiality of its research to date. An understanding of the significance of embroidery must acknowledge that embroiderers are mainly women and that embroidery seems to offer them a means of production and expression outside of dominant patriarchal forms (see Messick, 1987; Niessen, 1985;1994). Embroidery is associated with women, not because it is inherently feminine, but because it is available to them. Examining this relationship without imposing Western ideals about femininity or a presumed shared experience of oppression (see Mohanty,1988; Amos & Parmer,1984) is essential to understanding embroidery comprehensively.

Feminism has demonstrated that the means of assigning epistemic, moral and economic value have been predicated on an objective, scientific or art historical model. Feminism has furthermore opened up the potential to consider multiple possibilities and a range of ways of knowing. Code has suggested, for example, intuitive, experiential, and aesthetic ways of knowing (Code, 1991). I reject therefore, the characterization of the silent, unknown, and unknowing craftsperson in favour of one historically and ideologically silenced, yet knowing. Craft should be examined as feminists have come to examine women: as legitimate, knowing subjects, historically and culturally situated.

The feminism I embrace and believe should influence the consideration of craft and especially embroidery is one that acknowledges and explores the potent grey areas between poles. It is a feminism which is critically aware of the hierarchies and biases resulting from science's monopoly of knowledge. It is one which fosters a "discursive space" (Gross, 1986, p.204) for exploring multiple possibilities, and for re-evaluating the role of personal experience and the subjective in the construction of knowledge

(Hawkesworth, 1989; Haraway, 1988; Code, 1991). This middle ground, forged between the dichotomies that have dominated Western thinking, offers a place to share ideas, tap new potential, and study embroidery as if it matters. Craft and especially embroidery, though traditionally relegated to the hinterlands rather than a middleground can legitimately take its place in a creative, scholarly milieu.

Redefining Embroidery

Embroidery is a productive skill whereby pre-formed fabric is embellished with thread through the use of a needle. It is also the object so embellished. Embroidery is therefore both act and object. In her book on textile classification, Irene Emery (1980) discusses embroidery in relation to accessory stitches-- that is, stitches that are accessory to the construction of the cloth. She notes the fine line between decorative and utilitarian stitches. The famous Bayeux tapestry is a familiar example of stitches used in a decorative, and in this case narrative, fashion. Japanese sashiko embroidery is a good example of functional stitches whose decorative potential is exploited. The point to be made here is that embroidery **functions** and it does so in a variety of ways including the narrative and symbolic. I agree with Emery that there is no rigid line dividing the functional and the decorative-- only degrees of usefulness.

My working definition of embroidery includes then, this technical component, reference to the object produced, as well as its meaning-- a vague term including function, significance, purpose, and use-- materially and metaphysically. To embrace **function** in its broadest sense reveals my anthropological orientation as well as my background as a craftsperson. Whereas fine art denies function in favour of transcendent expression, the craft perspective I develop in this thesis, rejects this dichotomy while celebrating and exploiting function and context. As such it aims not at universalizing rules, but at understanding. The craft perspective is meant to transform and integrate with other approaches, not substitute for them. As Code (1991) has reminded us, both subjectivity and objectivity are necessary for the production of knowledge. Consequently my aims are to understand embroidery in relation to culture and specifically in relation to the women who produce it. That so many accounts celebrate embroidery yet ignore the women who create it is scandalous and, as I will develop further, evidence of patriarchy at work.

Embroidery is an index of women's lives in culture, a theme proposed and argued by Parker. In her seminal work, The Subversive Stitch (1984) Parker notes that **what** embroidery is cannot be divorced from **where** and **how** it is. She examines the history of European embroidery from the Middle Ages noting the increasingly important role embroidery played in women's education--becoming an indication of their chastity, industry, morality, and Christianity-- in short, their femininity or worth as women. She discusses how embroidery moved from being a professional activity practised by men and women, to an amateur activity associated with women and domesticity (Parker, 1984).

> The Victorians identified embroidery with femininity in the context of rigidly defined sex roles. Embroidery is still identified with femininity, but the framework has changed. Women have challenged the constraints of femininity and entered previously masculine preserves. On the whole women no longer embroider as a gesture of wifely or domestic duty. But the aspect of embroidery as a bond between women has lived on. Books, dominated by women constitute a curiously autonomous female area. It is largely ignored by men. Chivalrous approval has given way to silence, unless embroidery is carried across the borders into masculine territory (Parker, 1984, p.215).

My debt to Parker is ideological and significant. Unfortunately, few have heeded her cry and explored other embroidered histories of women. Rather, silence or attempts to carry embroidery "across the borders into masculine territory" have continued to characterize the sporadic literature on embroidery. Embroidery has suffered from exclusion, marginality, and from denying its specificity-- a specificity that, as I have noted above, (often) encompasses an association with women. The biases against embroidery which I will explore in this thesis stem from a feminist critique; I seek to reveal how embroidery, domesticity, subjectivity, material necessity, craft, and holistic technologies in general are associated with women and have acted to render embroidery (seemingly) insignificant. Where Parker has examined the historical development of embroidery and its association with the development of femininity in Western society, I propose a

complimentary study examining the philosophical basis for the division of art and craft that subsequently disadvantaged embroidery and its study cross culturally.

Textiles and Culture

Anthropological approaches to the study of material culture have increasingly influenced the field of textile studies. Where both fields were initially descriptive and concerned with the classification of objects (Mason, 1901; Hatt, 1914/1969), they have moved to examining objects embedded in culture. Regrettably, studies of hand embroidery have not yet developed in this way. Within the field of textile studies, Weiner and Schneider (1989) and Schneider (1987) have been particularly influential in applying and determining the dimensions of a contextual approach to the study of ethnographic textiles. While they encompass embroidery within a general framework of ethnographic textiles, it remains largely marginal. In this section I examine the benefits of a contextual approach to the study of textiles before discussing the scarcity and limitations of existing studies of embroidery.

Shaped by culture, material objects express, resist, symbolize, and otherwise function within culture. Consequently, archaeologist and engineer Lechtman has proposed that cultural artifacts are consistently patterned, stylistically and technically.

> The ordered, redundant phenomena that constitute the patterned structure of all culture are expressed as style in verbal, kinesic and technological behavior. Style is the manifest expression, on the behavioral level, of cultural patterning (Lechtman, 1975, p.4).

Textile scholar Bird (1960) discusses something similar with respect to ancient Peruvian woven textiles. He notes that the uniformity of textile techniques over long periods within given areas suggests the conservatism of the medium. Consequently, he notes that

> if this is so, then an accurate knowledge of such feature as spinning, twist direction, warping procedure, and construction details may well serve as significant clues in tracing cultural diffusion and relationships (Bird, 1960, p.1).

Women of Value: Men of Renown (Weiner, 1976) represents the groundbreaking effort of an anthropologist to examine the cultural significance of textile fibres. While

not the first anthropologist to do so, Weiner's book is notable because she implicates banana fibres in the reproduction of life-- a process controlled by Trobriand women and unknown or ignored in Malinowski's Trobriand ethnographies. Weiner describes the vast resources and social networks necessary for the accumulation of banana fibre bundles and skirts. Women's roles via these fibres are significant. Closely associated with birth and death, women are the source of *dala*-- mythic Trobriand ancestry. At death it is the women who ensure the regeneration of dala by repaying other women (with banana fibre bundles and skirts) according to their relationship to the deceased and their roles in mourning. She notes

> payments are made which on one level have significant economic value. But I suggest that economic value is transcended by the fact that at death rituals women must restore that which is *dala* to their *dala*. Women cut away social relationships developed through exchange and in so doing, secure the regeneration of pure *dala*. The trauma of death is averted as women once again, as at conception, reproduce a being now disconnected from the widest range of social networks (Weiner, 1976, p.120).

Thus Weiner examines textile fibres as commodities in transactions of physical and metaphysical exchange controlled by women. Schneider (1978) has examined textiles as commodities of significance to the moral and political economy of Europe from the Middle Ages. In her ambitious review article, "The Anthropology of Cloth," she notes "the role of cloth consumption in the consolidation of social relations and in the expression of social identities and values" (Schneider, 1987, p.409). Cloth, then, functions politically, economically, socially, and cosmologically-- reflecting cultural values. These themes are further explored in Cloth and Human Experience edited by Weiner and Schneider (1989). Introducing the book, they write that

> throughout history, cloth has furthered the organization of social and political life. In the form of clothing and adornment, or rolled or piled high for exchange and heirloom conservation, cloth helps social groups to reproduce themselves and to achieve autonomy or advantage in interactions with others. This book brings to light the properties of cloth that underlie its social and political contributions, the ritual and social

> domains in which people acknowledge these properties and give them meaning over time (Weiner & Schneider, 1989, p.1).

Drawing on their examples, context is crucial in understanding the significance of cloth. This approach has implications for a definition of embroidery, expanding it temporally, contextually, and cognitively. My definition of embroidery above, consistent with an anthropological understanding of material culture, challenges the narrow focus of art history on form and content.

Anthropologist David Guss notes the distinction often made between content and function in the West. The latter he says is often dismissed yet "should conform to the same structure of meaning that determines all its other aspects, and therefore possess the same power to reveal it" (Guss, 1989, p.126). Further, he notes

> the various elements in the completed work [of tribal art] are not subordinated to one another in a hierarchy of ideas that are ultimately distilled as content, but share in the independent creation of meaning. Like the entire culture it reproduces, the work of art is the union of a multifaceted set of interlocking statements, each reinforcing and mirroring the other (Guss, 1989, p.127).

With Guss I propose that "function" be embraced as part of any discussion of embroidery being part of what distinguishes and lends meaning to it.

While Schneider (1987) and Weiner and Schneider (1989) admirably discuss dimensions of the cultural significance of textiles and textile fibres, embroidery is largely absent from their discussions. They ignore the potent suggestions offered by Parker (1984)[3] contributing (if inadvertently) to the omission and consequent silence of embroiderers. The few paragraphs devoted to embroidery in Schneider (1987) focus on the appearance and form of embroidery-- its relationship to painting rather than women and culture. Cloth and Human Experience (1989) includes only one article devoted to embroidery. Waterbury (1989) examines the effects tourism has had on the production of Oaxacan embroidered blouses, noting the increased alienation of embroiderers from one another, and the means of production-- distancing them from the original significance of

the product itself. Embroidery is just an instance, an example of the effects of capitalism on rural economy. Other references to embroidery in the volume include those made by Darish (1989) who, discussing the raffia textiles of the Kuba, notes their joint production and ownership by men and women. Both sexes similarly make shirts and decorate them using embroidery, applique, patchwork and various dyeing techniques. Nevertheless, only women employ cut-work and cut-pile stitching. Darish does not elaborate this distinction and focuses instead on the uses of the finished textile products. Embroidery is also mentioned by Stone-Ferrier (1989) in an article discussing seventeenth century depictions of female handwork. She notes the portrayal of spinners as virtuous as compared to the more ambivalent portrayal of embroiderers and lacemakers.

> The female spinner or winder may have been consistently depicted as virtuous in paintings... because spinning and winding constituted the vital steps of clothmaking. Embroiderers and lacemakers, who were depicted in both virtuous and lascivious contexts, produced ornamentation that was valued by many but was considered a superfluous and condemnable luxury by others (Stone-Ferrier, 1989, p.224-224).

While the comments made on embroidery in Schneider (1987) and Weiner and Schneider (1989) are important to a general discussion of embroidery, they are nevertheless limited. They discuss embroidery as a commodity or means of production in the strictest sense, as symbol and technique. They privilege a more objective understanding where embroidery is "carried across the borders into masculine territory," to borrow Parker's phrase. This body of literature subverts a more comprehensive understanding of the significance or meaning of embroidery because it focuses on surfaces, objective, quantifiable qualities divorced from context. It consequently prevents a discussion of embroidery as knowledge-- as a particular adaptive strategy available to women.

In many regards this thesis examines the power to name. Embroidery, for example is considered craft, not fine art-- a distinction loaded with prejudices rooted in the history of art, philosophy and science. The power to name implies a power to determine and judge. At the very least, feminism has taught us that labels are not neutral, in gender or other ways. Craftsman, postman, artist, scientist: these are labels which have overtly or covertly excluded women. Words themselves carry enormous power and the ability to name carries the weight of social and scientific legitimacy. Naming is a form of intellectual colonialization where the idea is occupied and manipulated from above. A general trend among contemporary scholars is to examine the effects of the relationship between researcher and researched, name-giver and receiver. Some attempt to invert it, to study it from within or below, from the perspective of the "other", the oppressed, the subaltern[4], women, etc. They attempt to conduct **ethno**history, **ethno**science, or even **ethno**aesthetics (Goodenough, 1956; Price & Price, 1980), recording and making sense of indigenous categories and explanations. They attempt to focus attention on the voices and agency of those who have been silenced or unrecognized by older, more conservative paradigms. These voices, where they are heard, claim that embroidery is not a frivolous decorative technique or, to borrow Rossbach's phrase, "foolish busywork", but meaningful in its own right (see Parker, 1984; Weir,1989; Chaussonet, 1988).

Limiting discussion of embroidery and craft to their objective characteristics, their techniques or forms, renders them (relatively) meaningless. What is left out of this literature is not just indigenous terminology, but indigenous understanding-- specifically that of the women who are the producers of embroidery. Embroidery is distinguished by its association with women, not because it is feminine, but because embroidery is available to them and they have historically used it as a form of expression and to decorate themselves and their homes. Moreover, embroidery is a craft and functions in the broadest sense of the word. Like other textiles, embroidery functions aesthetically, economically, and politically (see Schneider, 1987; Weiner & Schneider, 1989). Parker

(1984) has demonstrated how embroidery was an index of women's lives during the nineteenth century in Europe. I believe embroidery must be examined as an instance of women's knowledge and as a cultural strategy.

The holistic definition of embroidery I proposed earlier in this introduction is clearly anthropological and identifies my cultural (as opposed to aesthetic, behavioural, technical etc.) biases. It is by taking into account the social, cultural, and historic context of embroidery that ethnocentric, androcentric biases can be avoided. Embroidery needs to be understood as a dynamic and integrated phenomenon if we are to avoid objectifying and ultimately trivializing it.

Existing theoretical frameworks for the study of embroidery have limited, even thwarted the study of hand embroidery as something significant. But, I believe embroidery is significant-- particularly to women in areas of the world where patriarchy limits their choices for expression. Consequently, the development of a new theoretical framework, one self consciously aware of the sexist, ethnocentric prejudices of earlier models is necessary and long overdue.

Though developing a theoretical framework for the study of embroidery is beyond the aim of this thesis, I nevertheless lay the essential groundwork for its construction. I examine those bodies of literature which have ideologically influenced the study of embroidery by Euro-American and Indian scholars, initiating a particular position which I call the craft perspective. I situate embroidery firmly within the realm of craft and subsequently determine the aims, if not the means, of a more comprehensive theoretical framework. These aims are in keeping with current feminist and anthropological thought. Embracing function and process, this is an overtly 'craft' perspective. I argue that while function and process have damaged embroidery's reputation as art, they give meaning to it as craft. Context is also important to the craft perspective-- something dismissed by many art historians. My craft perspective embraces

context in the anthropological sense, as well as embodied context in a phenomenological sense. This emphasizes the situated, processual, or rather, 'crafted,' aspects of embroidery. It challenges the dichotomy of researcher/researched through the shared experience of embroidery invoking moral responsibility. Moreover, it challenges the hegemonic authority of patriarchal discourses and argues for more humane, equitable, and holistic ways of producing knowledge.

The implementation of the aims I propose, as theory and discrete method, remains to be developed. Existing theoretical frameworks are generally implicit and contribute only superficially to the cultural understanding of hand embroidery. The craft perspective initiates a new approach by acknowledging that embroiderers are knowledgeable and that embroidery is significant. This approach focuses not on the surface qualities of embroidery, but on the act or gesture of embroidery and its meaning. Consequently, the craft perspective clears an ideological path for the recognition of the epistemic and ontologic value of embroidery and the subsequent development of a more comprehensive and explicit theoretical framework.

Figure 2. Now settled in Sumrasar, Kutch, the Sodha people originated in Pakistan. The embroidery the Sodha women produce is very fine and not unlike the phulkari embroideries of Punjab. This woman is producing embroidered garments and cushion covers for a cooperative which markets them in Bombay.

Chapter 2
The Power of Art History

In a dramatic scene from the 1987 film by Kureishi, Sammie and Rosie Get Laid, a young photographer from North America asks a mature Asian Indian politician and former anti-colonial activist whether he, like she, chants mantras. He disdainfully replies "'For you the world and culture is just a department store. You take something from every floor.' To which she replies, unfazed, 'I'm a free spirit-- open to everything" (in Phillips, 1988, p.64). Their confrontation is symbolic as Phillips points out,

> the indignation of the older man, the representative of the Third World, is provoked by what he sees as an unreflective appropriation, and therefore a cannibalization, of his traditional culture. The response of the young woman-- who represents, in the movie, the impartial eye of the artist-- is the time-honored justification of Western connoisseurs, the privileging of Western connoisseurs, the privileging of individual esthetic experience (Phillips, 1988, p.64).

The irony of this episode is that the young artist neither chants mantras like the Indian gentleman, nor is she as free as she presumes. She is trapped by an appropriated and therefore limited understanding of Indian cosmology. She reproduces the idea that 'understanding' can be achieved through appropriation and that mantras can be isolated, decontextualized, and resurrected in a new context. Moreover, she acts on a common stereotypical view of Indian culture. She equates the Indian with spirituality, obscuring the particulars of his life in favour of received impressions[5]. This unreflective appropriation and stereotyping ideologically colonize Indian culture. Her attitude reflects the control and manipulation of Indian and other non-Western cultures by the West-- an attitude of unwavering confidence in naming, determining, and judging the 'other'-- an attitude exercised by art history and reflected by the literature on Indian embroidery.

Map 1. The Indian Subcontinent
(based on Hammond, 1971).

Map 2. Western India
(based on Hammond, 1971).

The Western Indian states of Gujarat and Rajasthan are well known for the vibrant, colourful embroidery produced there. Women embroider the blouse fronts, skirt and headcloth borders that make up a significant portion of their dowries (see Figures 8,11) (Elson, 1979;1991; Frater, 1975). Children's clothing is also embroidered (see Figures 4,5,9) as are hangings for doorways, bags, animal trappings, and *sthapanas*-- square wall hangings depicting Hindu deities especially Ganesha (Hitkari, 1981). Embroidery on men's contemporary clothing seems to be restricted to certain groups. In 1992 I observed embroidered jackets worn by Rabari men of Kutch (which were often purchased in the market and machine stitched)(see Figure3) and embroidered caps worn by Muslim men. The embroidery of this area has been enriched through the historical introduction of immigrants from surrounding areas including Sindh (see Figure 2), Baluchistan, Swat and Iran (Frater, 1992). Embroidery remains largely associated with rural as opposed to urban centres, and low caste or tribal peoples as opposed to higher castes. While embroidery is certainly made and worn in cities and by upper caste women, it is more often as a fashionable accessory or as part of a folk dance costume than an integral feature of these women's lifestyles and identities.

The history of India's earliest textiles is culled largely from archeological materials, religious texts, and illustrations (see Silverstein, 1981; Olson, 1965; Welch, 1985). Later history, particularly that following European contact, is told mainly from the point of view of Europeans and relies on non-indigenous source materials (especially Irwin & Hall, 1971, 1973; Irwin & Schwartz, 1966). Unfortunately, the research conducted on the history of Indian textiles generally and the embroidery of Western India specifically, is influenced by antiquated notions of material culture-- especially art history. As such it is characterized by description and classification of embroidery types, styles, motifs, and stitches divorced from cultural context.

In his discussion of the creation of the 'Oriental' and 'Orientalism', Said notes

> taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient-- dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western Style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said, 1979, p.3).

The same mindset, the same methods of dealing with the 'other,' characterize early (and some contemporary) representations of North American indigenous peoples. The stereotypically constructed, grossly materialistic, sexually licentious, fanatical, and violent Oriental can be compared with the drunken, ignoble, irreligious, and savage North American Indian, both being strategic representations justifying colonization (see Berkhofer Jr., 1988; Green, 1988). These stereotypes, plus the very fact of European presence, demonstrated European superiority.

> The Scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader, or the soldier was in, or thought about, the Orient because *he could be there*, or could think about it, with very little resistance on the Orient's part (Said, 1979, p.7).

Similarly,

> The European takeover of the New World first by Spanish conquest and later by French and English invasion proved to Europeans, at least, the superiority of themselves. Common concepts plus successful conquest reinforced the stereotype of the deficiency of "savages" everywhere and validated the continued use and the glossing over of the growing knowledge of specific social and cultural differences among New World peoples (Berkhofer Jr., 1988, p.525-26).

Berkhofer Jr. and Said note that the North American Indian and Oriental were seen as the antithesis of European self identity. As 'other', they represented an underground or repressed self, evidence of an earlier level of development. As the undeveloped, uncivilized, unfortunate 'other', laissez-faire economics, social Darwinism, paternalism and colonialism could be justified.

Green (1988) discusses the manipulated representations of North American Native persons in literature and the visual arts noting the fascination of Euro-Americans with these images. Berkhofer Jr. notes that European views of Amer-Indians fluctuated

between the noble savage, faced with inevitable extinction, and the "bad" Indian, who got what he deserved (Berkhofer Jr., 1988). In an article devoted to analyzing the induced embroidery 'traditions' of the Huron in Eastern Canada, Phillips describes how early stitched representations of Huron people, made for sale under the guidance of the French-Canadian Ursuline nuns, show the Huron semi-naked. Later representations, produced after the nuns had departed, depict the Huron more realistically in contemporary ceremonial clothing (Phillips, 1993). Where Natives could not re-appropriate these representations, they took on a life of their own becoming icons "whose recognition factor, as they say on Madison Avenue, out-ranks, on a world scale, that of Santa Claus, Mickey Mouse, and Coca Cola combined" (Dorris, 1987, p.99). European artists and designers including Delacroix, Ingres, Renoir, Matisse, Bakst, and Poiret were, to borrow Said's words, "provoked" rather than "guided" by the Orient. They exploited/ perpetuated the exotic, sensual, terrifying intensity of the Oriental-- representations as generalized and far from reality as those which depict North American Indians as uniformly wild and bedecked with (Sioux) feather war bonnets.

While Indian embroidery has remained marginal to art history's overt manipulations, its treatment is telling and reveals the same need to generalize, colonize and dismiss the "other" as inferior. Consequently the embroidery of Western India has often been discussed as if it were a uniform unit. Embroidery across Rajasthan, Gujarat, and parts of Pakistan (especially Sindh) share similar colours, stitch types, motifs, styles of representation, and the use of mirrors. This assumed unity, however, is based on visual stereotypes. The presence of the chain stitch and mirrors are most often used to characterize these embroideries regionally More subtle differences of embroidery styles according to community (as opposed to state), economic class, caste or jati, means of production, or individuality are ignored.

Another method of essentializing the difference between "us" and "them" is through stressing the effects of tradition and, preeminently, religion. In (mainly) older art

Figure 3. On his way to a wedding in Banni District, Kutch, this man wears the jacket associated with Rabari men. Note the machine embroidery around the neck edge and front openings.

history texts (Gardner, 1936), the arts of Islamic countries were, routinely discussed as 'Muhammadan'-- a serious, pejorative misconception of both the art and the faith (Said, 1979). These arts are routinely dismissed as non-representational and religious, pitting them against the criteria for Fine Art.

Similarly, in India Hindu and Muslim women favour different clothing styles while the well known Muslim avoidance of representational imagery is said to characterize their embroidery (Elson, 1979). Nevertheless, as Elson also notes, the interaction between Hindu and Muslims in Kutch has resulted in a fusion of embroidery and clothing styles. This underlines the danger of privileging religion at the expense of other factors (possibly in this case their shared means of livelihood, geographic isolation, and social marginalization). Privileging religion as the basis for difference betrays a Western obsession, as Lazreg (1988) has discussed with respect to Islamic Algerian women. Western scholars privilege religion since that is how "they" are most different from "us". Consequently "we" deny possibility of deviation from some monolithic religion. The fact remains that many of these embroiderers are marginally Hindus. Many are Harijans or Tribals who have converted to Islam or, more recently, Christianity-- often without giving up all of their Hindu or animistic beliefs. As a result it is not uncommon for both Hindus and Muslims to worship at shrines of Muslim saints or Hindu deities (see Moore, 1993; Gold, 1988; Wadley, 1994). Religion also plays a different role among various socio-economic groups. Wadley (1994) for example notes that many lower caste people cannot necessarily spare the time or resources needed for worship.

While fine art has played an obvious role in the creation and promotion of these stereotypes, art history has institutionalized this power to name and determine. The fine arts and their study developed in the mid to late eighteenth century (see Chapter 3) contemporary with European expansion east and west. Art history absorbed the justificatory strategies used to bolster Western superiority. Underlying assumptions of art

history include universality. It assumes "that its history is the only history, and that other (primitive) people don't have one" (Ades, 1986, p.12; see also Wolf, 1982). Similarly,

> since Whites primarily understood the Indian as an antithesis to themselves, then civilization and Indianness as they defined them would forever be opposites. Only civilization had history and dynamics in this view, so therefore Indianness must be conceived of as historyless and static (Berkhofer Jr., 1988, p.529).

This is evident in the many discussions of Indian embroidery which stress the timelessness and traditional aspects of embroidery. Writing about the mirrored *phulkari*[6] work of the Punjab (see Figure 1), Mehta comments:

> though rather ornate, the dully scintillating glass pieces reflecting the hues of the embroidered cloth lend the shawl a rather uncommon charm... Quite a lot of crude work is palmed off on the ignorant as true phulkari. The colours are garish, aniline dyes having been used instead of the natural products of old (Mehta, 1970 p.26).

Rather than viewing this change as the result of development or acculturation, Mehta dismisses contemporary phulkari as decline. The 'traditional' is therefore more 'authentic' and venerated at the expense of the new (see Figures 6 and 7). The author betrays his ethnocentric smugness further by passing judgment on, not only the phulkaris, but those who make them.

This assumed power is evident by what is chosen to be written about, and consequently, what is ignored. Irwin's various collaborative works are without question the best known and the most often cited accounts on Indian textiles. He concentrates on the 'finer' embroideries, textiles made for trade with the West and on those made under court patronage (Irwin & Hall, 1971; 1973; Irwin & Schwartz, 1966). As such his point of view is extremely limited. There are few complimentary studies which focus on the Indian side of the trade equation, on the folk traditions of embroidery, or the relationship between courtly and folk traditions. Irwin's ethnocentric point of view perpetrates (if inadvertently) Western notions of art, as opposed to craft, fine art as opposed to folk art.

Art history assumes that the fine arts developed through set stages-- stages determined according to the development of the Western Fine Arts. As Grabar has noted

> we more or less accepted as truth that the linear progression of Italian Art from the fourteenth century to the seventeenth was paradigmatic of all artistic developments (Grabar, 1982, p.284).

This process is reminiscent of the stages of human development outlined by evolutionists in the nineteenth century (L.H. Morgan and E.B. Tylor) in which "primitive" peoples represented earlier stages of development while European males represented the pinnacle of development and civilization (Gabarino, 1977).

> The West has... tended to believe that... it is necessarily in the vanguard of constant progress ever onward and upward. So far as the perceived cultural and aesthetic values of other societies are similar to its own, they are judged to be 'civilized' or 'primitive' (Ades, 1986, p.12).

Evidence for this is readily available in standard art history texts (Janson, 1974; Gombrich, 1950; Gardner, 1936) as well as in the literature on Indian embroidery. The standard "history" traces the development of art from its prehistoric origins in the Middle East and Egypt, through Classical Greece, to the European Middle Ages and Renaissance, and finally to the Modern Art of Europe. It emphasizes increasing technical mastery in representing nature objectively (and therefore realistically), the superiority of painting and sculpture (as opposed to crafts or the decorative arts), an increasing tendency towards secular as opposed to sacred arts (concept of art for arts sake), individualism, and the cult of the artist as genius.

Art history presumes a line of development originating in Mesopotamia but culminating in Europe. It is a history of patched bits and pieces selected to legitimize European Art-- a sort of botched pedigree. Contrary to assumptions, it is neither objective nor free of bias. The art of the Middle East, for example, is only mentioned in connection with art's origins and then as an aberration during the European Dark Ages or

Middle Ages-- a period of slow development in Europe but of brilliant artistic achievement under the Ottomans. It is a racist history made possible by denying independent art histories, independent explanations, and by including only what fits and therefore supports a unitary, Western, vision (Ades, 1986; Phillips, 1989).

This evolutionist bias influences not only the relative status of embroidery within the arts, but the treatment of embroidery itself.

> The development of the art of embroidery is closely connected with the era of the individual in the history of mankind and reflects the personal expression of an entity. Man has always tried to make a given material look nicer and better by embellishment, which was the beginning of embroidery, from the simplest with counted threads to the more complicated patterns with plastic effect of metal threads. Romans called embroidering "painting with needle," for individuality of design has been as important to the embroiderer as to an artist performing in the field of art (Chattopadhyay, 1977, p.1).

Chattopadhyay is arguing for a parallel development of fine art and embroidery stressing personal expression while noting an increasing complexity of form and representation. Her comparison of embroidery with painting betrays her model of what constitutes fine art. However, embroidery (like fine art) is decontextualized and misrepresented by this comparison. The extent to which embroidery offers court or folk embroiderers personal expression, for example, is extremely tenuous.

Chattopadhyay describes embroidery as a feminine art because "it does not call for muscular strength or intellectual exercise... only artistic skill and sensibility" (Chattopadhyay, 1977, p.3). Embroidery then, far from existing parallel to fine art, is feminine, subjective, and superseded by more masculine pursuits. While other similar references appear, more often than not, women and folk embroidery are ignored or omitted. I have already mentioned Irwin's focus on trade and courtly textiles-- fields largely controlled by men. Folk embroidery, associated with women, domestic pursuits and crafts have largely been excluded from both art history and most of the literature available on Indian textiles. Literature on Indian embroidery consequently attempts to

justify its focus by adopting the rigorous model of art history-- a model which is, however, antagonistic to it, obscuring the embroidery and embroiderers themselves.

Irwin (1959) notes that the Orient became known to Europe from the fifteenth century with increasing trade and, later, colonization. He notes the existence of "China shops" in London from 1571 (Irwin, 1959, p.86); nevertheless the independent artistic traditions with which Europeans came in contact were not acknowledged as such. The standard art history recognizes the influence of the Far East, Africa, and the Americas on artists, but not the historical integrity of these traditions. Their exotic objects were not valued as fine arts so much as they were collectible curiosities, available sources of inspiration, and feats of technical virtuosity. Imported Indian textiles, for example, astounded Europeans by their lightweight, wash and light-fast colours (Irwin, 1959; p.84; Gittinger, 1982, p. 17). They had little aesthetic appeal to the Europeans except where they corresponded with ideals of what Oriental textiles should look like-- in other words how 'Chinese' they looked. China, Japan, and India as well as the rest of the Far East, were subsumed under the label 'Oriental.' The style associated with this is called 'chinoisserie,' a European convention based loosely on Chinese designs (Irwin, 1959, p.86). It is not surprising therefore that Europeans began to dictate what was produced abroad and sent home, providing chinoisserie patterns for textiles in India (Irwin, 1959) and porcelain wares in China (Harrison Tidswell, 1979).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century anthropology as a discipline began to take shape and ethnographic museums came into existence. Simultaneously, European artists were reacting against the narrow classicism of Western art. Rebels included Delacroix, Gauguin, and Byron who infused their works with the passion and sensuality of the Oriental. Increasingly the Oriental, the (Amer) Indian, the "primitive" became models of escape and return to primordial, emotive roots-- admired because they were seemingly free, spontaneous, and untutored.

Increasingly nineteenth century European art was encouraged to reflect a European heredity with architects and critics on both sides of the English channel advocating a return to the Gothic style of the Medieval period. The roles that Ruskin, Pugin, and Morris played in encouraging the Gothic style as a truly English style is well known. In France, Viollet-le-Duc condemned the 'decadent' art of the Renaissance in favour of that of the European Middle Ages (Williams, 1985). This was the period of the Arts and Crafts Movement-- a revivalist movement instigated as much in aid of English (or French) nationalism as it was a reaction against industrial production. It aimed to improving the standards of design, while (for the socialist, Morris) advocating a return to hand production by independent craftspeople. Embroidery played a significant role in the Arts and Crafts movement (Callen, 1979). Fully domesticated by this point, however, it was protected from the influence "primitive" art would increasingly have on the arts of the twentieth century.

Picasso's famous painting, "Les Desmoiselles d'Avignon," (1907) depicts a group of European prostitutes with faces inspired by African masks seen at the Trocadero Ethnographic Museum in Paris (Williams, 1985, p.147). Picasso did not just represent the African masks-- he appropriated them. His use obliterates any indigenous significance through his manipulation and exploitation of their association (to the Western mind) with the wild, barbaric, sexual, primitive 'other'. As Price (1989) notes, these 'primitive' arts became increasingly available and known to Western audiences largely through the representations of artists like Picasso, Gauguin, and Van Gogh. Moreover, their representations became confused with the actual artifacts.

> In a sense, Picasso's image is cast in the role of the "original," with the African mask representing a startlingly close secondbest whose status depends on its affinity to a recognized masterpiece. Historically, the African mask came first, and Picasso was influenced by it; but for potential visitors to an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, Picasso's name and fame are of long-standing, and it is the African mask that is being newly introduced. The history of creation and the history of

> appreciation are, in this case (as in the case of Modern and Primitive Art more generally), inversely related... Modern Art holds claim to the titles of authenticity and recognized masterpiece status, and much of the popular admiration of Primitive Art is based on associations with features that first caught our interest through the work of twentieth-century Western artists (Price, 1989, p.96).

What artists and art history admired about so-called "primitive" arts is their expressiveness, their pan-human expressiveness. Nevertheless, this interpretation again privileges Western ideals, recreating the hierarchy of domination and subordination within the arts. It presumes that (only) Western artists and connoisseurs can recognize the inherent value of "primitive" art, reaffirming their authority to name and judge (Price, 1989). It is Western history that makes "primitive" art "aesthetically visible" to the world (Danto, 1988, p.314). That these connoisseurs chose African masks over African textiles or African anything, is telling. Art History is like a private club where only those who supported the greatness of its project were allowed in.

> For every idea about "our" art spoken for by Arnold, Ruskin, Mill, Newman, Carlyle, Renan, Gobineau, or Comte, another link in the chain binding "us" together was formed while another outsider was banished (Said, 1979, p.228).

Museums play a significant role in the dissemination of stereotypes about the 'primitive' other. They demonstrate European domination-- 'we' could go there, collect indigenous artifacts, and bring them home to display in 'our' ethnographic museums-- trophies glorifying 'ourselves' and the power of the state (Duncan & Wallach, 1980). Museums promote 'understanding' based on visual appearances, likenesses, and categorization. Through fragmentation, decontextualization (and recontextualization) and the ranking implicit to museum display, museums, like art history, exert the power to name and judge.

Focusing on objective qualities, on form as opposed to context or meaning, "primitive" arts and embroidery have been manipulated by an art history intent on demonstrating its own superiority. For example many compare the folk embroidery made

and used within families and *mochi bharat*, a form of chain stitch on leather or silk produced by the *mochi* or cobblers of Gujarat and Sindh. As decorative techniques or art forms their joint discussion is normative within the practices of art history. It ignores, however, their very real differences. Mochi bharat is produced by male, professional embroiderers using an ari, a small awl-like tool, often under court patronage (Grewel & Grewel, 1988; Jaitly, 1985; Dongerkerry, 1951, Irwin & Hall, 1973). What I am referring to as 'folk' embroidery is made by non-professional women, with needles, for their own use or exchange. Comparison of these 'forms' of embroidery, based on the fact that they both involve the chain stitch, is severely limited. The circumstances surrounding their production and use are obviously more important to a comprehensive understanding of them than understanding based on their observable facts.

The literature on the embroidery of Western India, influenced by art history, focuses primarily on embroidery as objects largely removed from historical and social context. It attempts to displace those objects from the system which creates meaning for it. Western art history affixes its own value judgments and meanings which may have nothing to do with those of the original culture. The problem with assigning new meanings to work (trying to view embroidery as fine art) is that the work is simply at odds with that new system. It was made by and for different conditions. The apologetic tone, the implied veneration of 'traditional' pieces at the expense of the new as well as the ethnocentrism implicit in most of the works I reviewed is a consequence of judging work from only one, Western art historical, value system.

Feminist critiques have been instrumental in provoking debates concerning the hegemony of art history. Born of their experience of exclusion and marginalization by the fine arts, early feminists sought to uncover lost women artists and rewrite the history of art (see Alloway, 1979; Gouma-Peterson, & Mathews, 1987). Nochlin's "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971) initiated the debate by examining the patriarchal nature of this exclusion. A later, more Marxist account noted that

> omission is one of the mechanisms by which fine art reinforces the values and the beliefs of the powerful and suppresses the experience of others (Gouma-Peterson & Mathews, 1987, p.332).

These accounts generally suggest deconstructing the power structures of art history which have excluded women and denied legitimacy to the arts in which women have traditionally been involved (see also Mascia-Lees, Sharpe & Cohen, 1989). Embracing a more contextual approach to the study of art is also suggested. Rees and Borzello discuss what they call the "New Art History" and note that

> at present, the two most distinctive trends in the new art history are the interest in the social aspects of art and the stress on theory... Part of its aim is to `deconstruct' the most familiar and unquestioned ideas, in particular the notion that the work of art is a direct expression of the artist's personality, the belief that art contains eternal truths free of class and time and the conviction that art is somehow `above' society or out of its reach (Rees & Borzello, 1986, p.8).

The feminist critiques of art history and the move to a more social basis for the study of art are relevant to the discussion of ethnographic arts, as well as those arts which do not, or have not, fit within the system. Art History presupposes a certain relationship to the art object-- it traditionally has denied indigenous context in favour of 'pure' form, a topic I will explore in the next chapter. This has resulted in studies which mainly describe and classify objects according to their visual appearance as opposed to their significance. Indeed, indigenous meaning is stifled by imposed Western ideals and prejudices as I illustrated above with respect to Picasso and African masks. Art history maintains a monopoly of legitimation, selectively including and excluding, manipulating history in support and justification of its own power.

Despite the deconstuction of the art historical system and analysis of what it has meant, 'Art' remains a powerful label. The status of objects traditionally considered outside the definition of fine art remain problematic. Whether fine art, primitive art, embroidery, craft, or ethnographic object, their relative standing and appropriate means

of display continue to be hotly debated (see Ames, 1987; Price, 1989; Danto, 1988; Vogel, 1991). Clifford, noting the current inventiveness and flexibility of the ethnographic art object system, sums up the themes of appropriation and discrimination which I have outlined above and which are implicit to Western art history. Noting the "unsettled" and "nomadic" life of non-Western art objects, he continues

> they have been diversely recontextualized, used as "cultural" or "human" evidence in the exhibit halls (or basements) of certain museums, made to stand for "artistic" beauty and creativity in others. They gain "value" in vaults or on the walls of bourgeois living rooms, are made and judged according to shifting criteria of authenticity, are bought from the Museum für Völkerkunde in Hamburg to hang beside a canvas of Joan Miró in New York. Where do these objects belong? I have been suggesting that they "belong" nowhere, having been torn from their social contexts of production and reception, given value in systems of meaning whose primary function is to confirm the knowledge and taste of a possessive Western subjectivity (Clifford, 1985, p.244).

Most of the literature I reviewed on Indian embroidery is of a descriptive nature and more popular than scholarly. Much of it attempts to revive interest in embroidery by arguing its merits as an art form (Dongerkerry, 1951; Chattopadhyay, 1977). Though I agree with these aims, I hesitate with the means of the arguments. Art history, as I have shown, cannot simply incorporate embroidery anymore than it can accommodate women. Consequently, it needs to be deconstructed-- its "subjectivity," as well as its ideological assumptions exposed.

Figure 4. Hindu Harijan girls photographed in Hodka, Banni District, Kutch. Their blouses and headscarves are embellished with purchased trim, as well as hand and machine stitching.

Figure 5. Hindu Harijan children in Hodka, Banni District, Kutch.

Chapter 3
Kantian Aesthetics and The Division of Art and Craft

In the previous chapter I examined how art history has represented the "other" and their artistic traditions-- stereotyping them and denying them legitimacy. Art history emerges as an ethnocentric, androcentric project. Embroidery, like women, is generally ignored by art history except where it approaches the criteria of fine art-- where it can be "carried across the border into masculine territory" (Parker, 1984, p.215). This is evident by the many, selectively told, histories of embroidery which ignore its specificity and downplay its relationship to craft and function (Johnstone, 1986). Rather, embroidery is compared to painting (Schneider, 1987; Chattopadhyay, 1977)-- a justificatory or apologizing strategy which questions neither the value of painting nor fine art. Indian embroidery, hindered by its association with the "other" (non-Western), and women (domestic and amateur), remains craft or "folk" as opposed to fine art. Embroidery, once sharing pride of place with painting and the other visual arts in the West, was increasingly disregarded and ignored (Parker, 1984; Staniland, 1991).

But colonialism, nationalism, and gender only partially explain the reduced status of embroidery (and the crafts). With the move from feudalism to merchant capitalism holistic forms of technology (craft production) were gradually replaced with more prescriptive forms of technology (industrial production) (Franklin, 1990a). But where the anonymous craftsperson was replaced by the anonymous factory worker, fine artists were distinguished and named. Technological development and its corresponding socio-political effects only partially explain the rise of the category fine art. Effecting this change in the status and role of the arts and artists, philosophy, as the history of ideas, offers another layer of insight into these distinctions. Consequently, in this chapter I examine some of the philosophical ideas which influenced and justified the segregation of the arts. Inspired by M'Closkey (1993), and drawing heavily on the work of Kristeller

(1951; 1952), I begin by outlining the evolution of what the latter calls the "modern system of the arts"-- the historical and ideological foundations of a philosophy of art-- aesthetics. Subsequently I turn to a discussion of the aesthetic theories associated with Kant and his influence on the crafts.

Considered the father of modern aesthetics (Schaper,1992), Kant is significant for breaking with his neo-classicist colleagues. Whereas the modern arts were seen by Winckelmann, Lessing, Schiller, and Goethe and other neo-classicists to have generally declined from the arts of the ancient Greeks and Romans (Nisbet, 1985), Kant explored the evolution of the modern arts. Ushering in Romanticism, Kant outlined an ideological framework for judgments of taste which introduced new criteria into the discussion of fine art.

> In the particular context of German Romanticism it seems almost impossible to overestimate the influence of Kant and his successors on the artists, writers and critics of the time. There was a continual and creative interchange between the poets and the philosophers, to a degree that may be impossible for us to imagine now (Simpson, 1984, p.2)

Kant towered over the field of aesthetics, influencing Schiller, Fichte, Schelling and Schopenhauer (Simpson, 1984, p.35), inaugurating, and anticipating modernist tendencies in the fine arts.

After a discussion of Kant's Critique of Judgment, therefore, I turn to an analysis of his effect on the crafts and, consequently, embroidery. I demonstrate how Kant prevented participation of crafts within his system of legitimation and their subsequent low status relative to fine art. I explore how Kant provided, what M'Closkey (1988) has called, "the kiss of death for crafts."

Art and Craft in History

Prior to the Renaissance, art and craft were not distinguished or ranked according to their aesthetic value. In ancient Greece the term for art (*techne*) and its Latin equivalent (*ars*) embraced a range of crafts and sciences. To the extent that distinctions were made among them, those which were associated with manual work (painting, sculpture, architecture, and the crafts) were distinguished from those considered more intellectual (poetry and music). Craft's association with 'manual' as opposed to 'intellectual' labour may not have carried the negative connotations later ascribed to this distinction. Graham's discussion of the craft of the ancient Greeks suggests that the consistent and productive abilities of the craftsperson were highly esteemed-- not for what they produced necessarily, but for their mastery or conquest of chance. He notes that

> the crafts represent practices in which the vicissitudes of fortune are conquered by the knowledge of the craftsman. Where the earlier Greeks had lamented that no matter how one might purpose, the fulfillment of his plans was on the knees of the gods. The Greeks of the enlightenment belong to a brave new world in which chance is largely banished at least in some spheres. The crafts represent the great hope for the future subjection of all chance to order and rationality. For the crafts are practices in which rationality prevails over chance as established procedures are applied systematically to obtain desired outcomes. The crafts become a paradigm of successful problem solving [7](Graham, 1991, p.10).

Just as industrial and computer technology have represented social progress in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so craft once represented the promise of rational planning and order.

Discussion of beauty in the ancient literature had more to do with moral goodness than an object's strictly formal qualities, a perspective that may have derived from the recognition of some inherent quality or essence associated with objects. Garrett (1987), for example, proposes an alternative understanding of Aristotle's use of the concept

techne (craft). He notes that modern philosophers, including Kant, interpreted craft as value-neutral and thus "as having value only as instruments for ends beyond production" (Garrett, 1987, p.283). Rather, he proposes the moral value of craft as process noting that;

> my point of departure takes seriously Aristotle's claim that *techne* is an excellence, a perfection. To miss this point is to miss in Aristotle the *amor essendi*, the love of being which pervades classical Greek thinking up to and including Aristotle. This love of being predisposes the thinker favorable towards all that is, in so far as it is, including well-made products of deliberate workmanship (Garrett, 1987, p.289).

What Garrett seems to be driving at is the nature of the thing itself, not inert but effective and having intrinsic moral value. What is important for the purposes of this discussion is the recognition that the crafts were not distinct from the arts or sciences and that the crafted object was valued for more than its purpose or formal qualities-- a sharp contrast with the aesthetics of Kant as we shall see.

The Middle Ages saw the rise of universities and the development of a scheme or classification of knowledge which included the seven liberal arts established in antiquity: grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. These were augmented with the growth of learning and introduction of new fields of thought (philosophy, medicine, theology etc.). Theoretically, the arts were scattered among the various disciplines within the universities; however, Kristeller notes that the visual arts were more likely to be restricted to the artisans' guilds. What appears to be the case, however, was a split, possibly an enhancement of one established in antiquity, not of art from craft, but of intellectual from mechanical pursuits. Kristeller notes further that the treatises written on the various arts at this time were largely technical as opposed to philosophical (Kristeller, 1951, p. 508).

Staniland proposes that medieval embroideries were highly valued as status symbols and "an integral part of medieval international diplomacy both as gifts and as

impressive attire for king and pope, prince and prelate alike" (Staniland, 1991, p.5). Moreover, the Middle Ages were a period of intense religious activity and the predominance of ecclesiastical as opposed to secular arts. The crafts of the stonemason, goldsmith, and painter were part of the didactic project illustrating the word of God. Embroidery was significant and an "important element in ecclesiastical splendour" (Staniland, 1991, p.5). Consequently, beauty was discussed not in relation to the arts themselves, but in relation to the metaphysical attributes of God.

With the Renaissance came the rise of the merchant class, increased secularism in the arts and the reorganization of the mechanical and liberal arts. The visual arts, painting, sculpture, and architecture, gradually became associated with the liberal arts, claiming kinship based on shared qualities with poetry on the one hand, and science on the other. Artists in Florence and later across Europe, cut their ties with the artisan's guilds which had regulated production and apprenticeship, forming the first art academy in 1563. That this was an engineered demonstration and claim to viability is suggested in the following quotation by Kristeller.

> The classical testimonies in favour of painting, mainly from Pliny, Galen and Philostratus, were not as authoritative and strong as the Renaissance authors who quoted them in support of their claim believed or pretended to believe. Yet the claim of Renaissance writers on painting to have their art recognized as liberal, however weakly supported by classical authority, was significant as an attempt to enhance the social and cultural position of painting and the other visual arts, and to obtain for them the same prestige that music, rhetoric, and poetry had long enjoyed. And since it was still apparent that the liberal arts were primarily sciences or teachable knowledge, we may well understand why Leonardo tried to define painting as a science and to emphasize its close relationship with mathematics (Kristeller, 1951, p.514).

Parker also notes the increasing disdain for the manual arts as opposed to more "intellectual" pursuits. She notes that with a guild system of production, one often collaborative and cooperative, the "inspired" individuality that distinguished the (modern) fine artists was prevented (Parker, 1984).

> The handwriting-- the recognizable, individual touch-- of the artist became as the direct trace of the inspired individual. Drawings and sketches were for the first time valued as evidence of the creative process. Speed, and an appearance of ease, were qualities admired in an artist... Embroidery, on the other hand, had always been admired for the hard labour it demanded, the patience and persistence it required (Parker, 1984, p.80).

Whereas painters and embroiderers had worked collaboratively, by the sixteenth century they were segregated. Embroiderers were reduced to copying designs no longer prepared on linen especially for them. The painters considered themselves "above" such work (Parker, 1984, p.80).

With advances in weaving technology filling demands for decorative textiles, embroiderers were forced to expand their markets and cater to the newly wealthy, merchant classes. This inspired "an increasingly domestic aspect to the creation and use of embroidery. Books of printed embroidery designs began appearing in the late 1520's, whilst embroidered samplers were also beginning to proliferate" (Staniland, 1991, p.5) Parker notes that embroidery from this time was increasingly associated with domestic, amateur, feminine production. Professional embroidery was also devalued as an art form as it was a collaborative activity, and because the embroiderers came from lower classes than the aspiring painters (Parker, 1984, p.81).

The importance of 'precedence' during the Renaissance spawned debates about the relative merits of the sciences and arts. Coincidentally, the activities deemed appropriate for the courtier, gentleman, or prince included developing appreciation for poetry, painting, and music. Furthermore, the "revival of Platonism helped spread the notion of the divine madness of the poet" (Kristeller, 1951, p.511) which spread to considerations of the visual arts. These three themes, the ordered merit of the arts and sciences, the association of art with aristocratic and cultured behaviour, and the anti-social but none-the-less insightful creativity of the **individual** artist, lay the groundwork

for the development of connoisseurship and the recognition of some less-than-tangible quality exclusive to the fine arts and artists.

The seventeenth century saw increased distinction and institutionalization of the arts and sciences with specific academies devoted to the fine arts, the natural sciences, music, dance etc. There subsequently developed a body of theoretical and critical literature specifically on the visual arts. The *'Querelle des Anciens et Modernes'*[8] prompted comparisons of the works of the Moderns with the Ancients helping to develop a specific critical language and classification system of the arts. Furthermore

> a point by point examination of the claims of the ancients and moderns in the various fields led to the insight that in certain fields, where everything depends on mathematical calculation and the accumulation of knowledge, the progress of the moderns over the ancients can be clearly demonstrated, whereas in certain other fields, which depend on individual talent and the taste of the critic, the relative merits of the ancients and moderns cannot be so clearly established but may be subject to controversy (Kristeller, 1951, p.525).

Thus we see in the seventeenth century the idea of progress underscoring distinctions, not only between the arts and sciences, but between the products of the Ancients and Moderns, and of independent or original creativity as opposed to dependant (functional) or cumulative creativity.

It should be no surprise, given the history related so far, that crafts and the mechanical arts seemed to recede to an artistic backwater. Fine art was able to distinguish itself by claiming an association with poetry and science. The development of perspective provided an enormous boost to painting's prestige-- it became even more science-like. Yet the crafts were also associated with sciences-- chemistry, metallurgy, botany, physics etc. Science could be demonstrated to have progressed since the time of the ancients. Techne had been associated with morality, hope and the supremacy of rationality over chaos to the Greeks (Graham, 1991). Ironically it may have been this ideal which pulled the (embroidered) rug out from beneath craft's feet. Craft was a

physical manifestation of the control human rationality had over nature. Painting, on the other hand, represented an intellectual and therefore higher manifestation of that same rationality. To do so the painted object, arguably as representational as any embroidered tapestry, had to be subsumed by the subjectivity of the artist on the one hand, the intellect on the other. Kant's theories would certainly develop these points. By the eighteenth century, the notion of the fine arts or *beaux arts* was established and appeared in French dictionaries (Kristeller, 1952). Philosophers of the first half of the eighteenth century continued to compare the relative merits of the arts and especially the products of the Ancients with the Moderns. Nisbet notes that Winckelmann, Lessing, and Goethe's work on aesthetics "may be seen as a prolonged epilogue to the *'Querelle des Qnciens et des Modernes'* of the preceding century" (Nisbet, 1985, p.3). Nevertheless, interest in the "psychology of aesthetic response and in the exemplary significance of works of fine art" dominated interest in aesthetics from the late eighteenth century beginning with the work of Kant. As Simpson notes,

> the particular arguments put forward by Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer and Hegel were of great importance, both in Europe and in America. This is the case both theoretically and historically: theoretically, because in the transition from the *Critique of Judgment* to Hegel's *Aesthetics* one can trace already a move from rational philosophy to something approaching what we now recognize as 'literary criticism'; and historically, because these thinkers exerted a definite influence on nineteenth-century thought, offering as some of them did a philosophical rationale for the newer movements in political theory, sociology, and the study of history and literature, as well as more technical initiatives in epistemology or the philosophy of science (Simpson, 1984, p.2)

Whether explicitly or implicitly stated, these rationals are responsible, at an ideological level, for the ethnocentric arrogance of art history discussed in Chapter 2. They are, moreover, responsible for the low status craft and embroidery have suffered in relation to art.

Outline of the Judgment of Taste

Whereas Kant (1724-1804) had initially rejected the possibility of anything other than an empirical study of the beautiful, by 1790 he had altered his point of view (Schaper, 1992). In the Critique of Judgment, the third and final volume of his critical enterprise,

> Kant analyzed the judgment of taste as a subjective judgment whose peculiar claim to validity differentiates it from mere avowals (Schaper, 1992, p.371).

Hence Kant distanced himself from empiricism as the basis of aesthetic judgment. Whereas many of his eighteenth century colleagues were obsessed with promoting the virtues of classical art often to the detriment of the modern, Kant was more concerned with demonstrating the rationality and therefore progressiveness of art. This rationalism, however, was one based not on the dogmatic knowledge of things themselves but of phenomena (Urmson & Rée, 1991, p.272).

In the Critique of Judgment, Kant sets out the four moments of the judgment of taste-- each of which partly explains the beautiful and the conditions for the judgment of taste. The first and third moments describe the conditions under which a judgment of taste may be made for an object to be considered beautiful. The second and fourth moments are concerned with reflecting on that judgment. Thus as Schaper notes,

> none of the four moments alone provides sufficient conditions for the taste judgment. But together, and working on two different levels-- the level of judging in experience and that of the judgment arising from it-- they satisfy, Kant believes, the requirements of separating the aesthetic from other modes of experience, and the judgment of taste from other kinds of judgment (Schaper, 1992, p.374).

Schaper sums up the moments thus:

> that is beautiful which is felt with disinterested pleasure (first moment). Calling something beautiful we deem it an object of universal delight (second moment). We discern in it "the form of finality perceived without the representation of a purpose (third moment). And we claim not only

> that it pleases but that it does so necessarily, and without concepts (fourth moment) (Schaper, 1992, p.373).

The first moment concerns a delight which is independent of all interest. Kant distinguishes therefore between the pleasant, the good, and the beautiful. He writes that,

> as regards the interest of inclination in the case of the Pleasant, every one says that hunger is the best sauce, and everything that is eatable is relished by people with a healthy appetite; thus a satisfaction of this sort does not indicate choice directed by taste (§5, 1929, p.379).

The pleasant therefore is connected with "pathological" or biological desires. The good, similarly, is concerned with morality and practical desires. Neither the pleasant nor the good represent for Kant free satisfactions because of 'our' concern for the real existence of those objects. Beauty on the other hand, is for Kant the only free satisfaction.

The second moment concerns the universality of the judgment of beauty. The recognition of beauty Kant seems to suggest is subjective but because it is interest-free, it is not restricted to individuals. Of the judgment of beauty. Kant notes that for the subject, if an object

> merely pleases *him*, he must not call it *beautiful*. Many things for him possess charm and agreeableness-- no one cares about that; but when he puts a thing on a pedestal and calls it beautiful, he demands the same delight from others (§7, 1984, p.39).

Consequently,

> the result is that the judgment of taste, with its attendant consciousness of detachment from all interest, must involve a claim to validity for all men, and must do so apart from universality attached to Objects, i.e. there must be coupled with it a claim to subjective universality (§6, 1984, p.38).

Objects, to be beautiful must be concept-free thus allowing for the harmony and free play of the imagination and understanding. This reflection of mental pleasure makes up the third moment. Schaper notes that "the aesthetic judgment that comes about has its ground in the heightened but non-cognitive awareness of the fittingness of the object for my enjoyment (Schaper, 1992, p.375). This "fittingness" is perhaps what Kant means by

the form of "finality"-- the object is complete in itself, unattached to the subject by need or desire and thus is suited to the subject's aesthetic pleasure.

The fourth moment concerns the necessity of the judgment of beauty. This is neither "theoretical objective" nor "practical" necessity but rather exemplary.

> In other words it is a necessity of the assent of *all* to a judgment regarded as exemplifying a universal rule incapable of formulation. Since aesthetic judgment is not an objective or cognitive judgment, this necessity is not derivable from definite concepts, and so is not apodictic[9] (§18, 1984, p.45).

Having identified and discussed the four moments of the judgment of taste, Kant moves on in the Second Book to an analysis of the sublime. This analysis introduces ideas of reason into the judgment of taste-- ideas which distinguish the beautiful from the sublime and prepare the ground for consideration of art and genius (Schaper, 1992, p.81). Both beauty and the sublime are based on reflective judgment, disinterest, are universal, and arise from the free-play of the imagination and understanding.

> Hence, both kinds of judgments are singular, and yet such as profess to be universally valid in respect of every subject, despite the fact that their claims are directed merely to the feeling of pleasure and not to any knowledge of the object (§23, 1984, p.47).

It is the differences between the sublime and the beautiful which are the most provocative and anticipate modernism. Kant notes that

> the beautiful in nature is a question of the form of the object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes a representation of *limitlessness*, yet with a super-added thought of its totality (§23, 1984, p.47).

The beautiful is furthermore connected with quality, the "furtherance of life, and is thus compatible with charms and a playful imagination" (§23, 1984, p.47). Whereas beauty is a positive pleasure and connected with an indeterminate concept of understanding, the

sublime is a negative pleasure and connected with an indeterminate concept of reason. Quantity is therefore essential to the sublime.

> This is a pleasure that only arises indirectly, being brought about by a feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful, and so it is an emotion that seems to be no sport, but dead earnest in the affairs of the imagination. Hence it is irreconcilable with charms [Reizen]; since the mind is not simply attracted by the object, but is also repelled thereby, the delight in the sublime does not so much involve positive pleasure as admiration or respect (§23, 1984, p.47).

This leads to perhaps the most important distinction between the beautiful and the sublime. The beautiful is something limited by form appearing "preadapted to our power of judgment " (§23, 1984, p.48). The sublime alternatively is limitless, formless, and "ill adapted to our presentational powers and even an "outrage" to our imagination" (Schaper, 1992, p.383). The sublime is not contained in objects, nor in nature; it is of the mind. Because it is almost beyond our capabilities, the sublime sets the mind in motion-- beauty on the other hand provokes a more restful response. Kant concludes that the sublime represents the supremacy of reason and therefore of man over nature.

> Therefore the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation, which we attribute to an Object of nature by a certain subreption [Subreption][10]; and this feeling renders as it were, intuitable the supremacy of our cognitive faculties on the rational side over the greatest faculty of sensibility (§27, 1984, p.51).

From the sublime Kant proceeds to distinguish art from nature. He notes that while an interest in the beautiful of art is not indicative of moral goodness, an immediate interest in the beauty of nature "is always the mark of a good soul" (§42, 1984, p.58). This was not an attempt at ranking one form of beauty above another so much as it was an attempt to introduce intellectual interest into the consideration of the response to beauty in art (Schaper, 1992, p.388).

> "Art is distinguished from *nature* as making (facere) is from acting or operating in general (agere), and the product or result of the former is

> distinguished from that of the latter as work (opus) from operation (effectus)"(§43). Art is further distinguished, "as a human skill," from science, "as a practical; from a theoretical faculty"; and as "free"art from craft, as having a "soul" rather than being a lifeless mechanical contrivance" (Schaper, 1992, p.388).

Art for Kant must be cloaked in the aspect of nature if we are to transcend its purposiveness. Our response to the beautiful in nature does not involve concepts and is therefore immediate. In order for a similar response to occur, "beautiful art must *look* like nature, although we are conscious of it as art" (§45, 1929, p.417). Kant's explanation for this tension between the purposiveness of art hiding behind the appearance of purposeless nature involves the concept of the artist as genius.

> Genius is the talent (natural endowment) which gives the rule to art. Since talent, as an innate productive quality of the artist, belongs itself to nature, we may put it this way: *Genius* is the innate mental aptitude (ingenium) *through which* nature gives the rule to art (§46 in Schaper, 1992, p.390).

Kant thus solves two problems. On the one hand, genius, as a gift of nature, accounts for a legitimate response to art, and on the other it explains the apparent `rules' of art. But art is not just a copy of nature. It is after nature, influenced, even ruled by nature but not at the expense of the originality or intellectual supremacy of the genius.

Schaper notes that the artist follows his own original genius and it is

> thus that Kant can maintain that genius is the special explanation that is needed for the creation of beautiful works of art. If artworks are intentionally made, then there must be a rule or concept according to which they are made; this rule or concept is not an ordinary rule or concept, based on an ordinary capacity (Schaper, 1992, p.390).

Rather, this capacity is rarefied and necessary for the production of fine art. Kant therefore succeeds in removing, indeed uplifting art from the production of artisans to that of a select few whose works appeal universally.

Kant and the Death of Craft

As I proceed with this research I am struck by the ever more powerful lens focused on fine art. With every increase in magnification, the view is intensified but narrowed-- the context lost. Kant focuses very closely on art, defining it rationally and in terms of cognition. He discusses the subjective experience of art yet subjectivity to Kant is something received in the mind, not necessarily generated within it. It is a subjectivity stripped of all sensory experience. It is a subjectivity based on the perception of pure form which can therefore be argued to be universal. There are many parallels between this and the objective ideal of science. The scientific method involves the control of variables under strict conditions in order to achieve replicability. Kantian aesthetics are similar in as far as they focus on tangible form (read: quantifiable and controlled), untainted by individual bias (read: disinterested), and insist on universality (read: reliability). By focusing on the form of the art object, a (passively) received representation, Kant's aesthetics share with science the devaluation of sensory experience. The eye is consequently not a sense organ so much as an impersonal tool for objective observation (see Code, 1991).

Kant's insistence on the possibility of pure form, stripped of all non-essentials, recalls fine art's earlier association with mathematics and how this was used to promote it at the expense of craft. He notes that colour, decoration, and tone are mere accessories which may detract from the beauty of form. Moreover, the subject who relies too heavily on the charms colour may add to art, betrays a crude level of taste.

> In painting, sculpture, and in all the formative arts-- in architecture, and horticulture, so far as they are beautiful arts-- the *delineation* is the essential thing; and here it is not what gratifies in sensation but what pleases by means of its form that is fundamental for taste (§14, 1929, p.396).

Kant dismisses, however, those objects which are too mathematical, too regular and therefore too repetitive. He notes that

> all stiff regularity (such as borders on mathematical regularity [sic]) is inherently repugnant to taste, in that the contemplation of it affords us no lasting entertainment (§22, 1984, p.46).

This reveals a contradiction or at least an inconsistency within the field of aesthetics. Mathematics were used to elevate art during the Renaissance, yet that which is too mathematical is eventually dismissed by Kant-- revealing the arbitrariness of his intellectualist approach to art and aesthetics. What legitimates art changes historically according to what it opposes. Consequently, art was raised above craft according to how intellectual and scientific it was, how precisely and mathematically it could represent nature. Consequently, art legitimates itself as like nature. It therefore transcends artifice, function, desire, and particularities.

Kant's insistence on pure form as the essence of beauty recalls Winckelmann's admiration of the 'colourless' marbles of antiquity[11]. Emotion, colour, and embellishment might add charm to an object but if they attract attention to themselves the beauty of the object is diminished. Kant thus effectively thrusts aside the decorative arts and crafts as self indulgent and not worth serious attention.

This concentration on form does not itself exclude craft. However, it restricts consideration of the object to the observable. While Kant recognizes that a symbolic connection exists between aesthetic objects and morality, any broader socio-cultural symbolic significance is not addressed. Similarly, that both art and craft were products produced by specific techniques by skilled practitioners is largely ignored. Rather, technical considerations must be transcended. "Art... appeals most strongly when it has the appearance of nature. It must therefore not display the labour enacted in its creation" (Simpson, 1984, p.59). This is consistent with Kant's explanation of the sublime. We are awed, overwhelmed not only by the massiveness of nature, but by its incomprehensibility. Kant does mention the importance of skill in relation to the mechanical and beautiful arts but the latter are distinguished through the unlearnable originality associated with genius.

The exclusion of craft from Kant's aesthetics is perhaps more obvious with respect to the first and second moments. The first was concerned with disinterestedness. An object is judged beautiful if the pleasure we derive from it is free of desire and need. This is an important wedge to force between art and craft (see M'Closkey, 1993). Kant claims that beautiful art is subsequently purposeless, like nature-- craft, on the other hand, is unavoidably purposive. Not only is craft linked to needs and desires, it is tainted by commercialism and the need to make a profit. We cannot ignore the fact that fine art production and connoisseurship were largely associated with the upper classes. The old distinctions of manual and intellectual labour took on new meanings and values with the rise of the merchant class. They had an interest in segregating themselves from the contemporary equivalent of blue-collar workers. Because Kant focuses only on the form of the art object, ignoring or unaware of its subjective or symbolic potential, he is able to purge fine art of its history. He insists that the beautiful object is disinterested yet ignores the long history of ecclesiastical and didactic art-- not to mention art functioning to glorify the state.

The second moment concerns the universality of the judgment of taste. Kant contends that beauty is universal rather than dependant on individual judgment. He denies individual subjectivity in favour of what he calls universal subjectivity. Again, his discussion is restricted to the form of the object-- aspects that can be seen and quantified. He further denies that individual taste is possible-- it contradicts his premises for taste.

Kant draws on a number of anthropological examples in his discussion of beautiful objects. He mentions Marsden's pepper garden in Sumatra, tattooing in New Zealand, and body painting among the Iroquois. He notes that it is only in society that man becomes interested in beauty.

> A man abandoned by himself on a desert island would adorn neither his hut nor his person; nor would he seek for flowers, still less would he plant them, in order to adorn himself therewith. It is only in society that it

> occurs to him to be not merely a man, but a refined man after his kind (the beginning of civilization) (§41, 1929, p.381).

Art, if not socially produced, is socially inspired-- though practically why this should be so Kant does not discuss. He discusses something close to cultural relativity. A definitive standard of beauty is not proposed by Kant; indeed to do so would contradict his first moment that art be disinterested and free. Formal standards are in any case only "normal Ideas" of form.

> If now in a similar way for this average man we seek the average head, for this head the average nose, etc., such a figure is at the basis of the normal Idea in the country where the comparison is instituted. Thus necessarily under these empirical conditions a negro must have a different normal Idea of the beauty of the [human figure] from a white man, a Chinaman a different normal Idea from a European etc. (§17, 1929, p.405-6).

The "normal Idea" can project only correctness. The "Idea" alternatively, transcends particularities, and expresses the moral . It is therefore connected with reason and pleases universally. Craft is, at best, like the normal idea in this scheme. While universal, it is denied universality since it is grounded in particularities.

Kant's discussion of the sublime is as instrumental in excluding craft as his insistence on disinterest. In a sense Kant comes back to the supremacy of reason. Where techne or craft represented the potential for reason to govern chance in nature for the Greeks, for Kant **reason** reigns supreme. But Kant's is a strictly intellectual reason divorced from the existence of real and therefore productive objects.

Kant notes that the sublime is a negative pleasure felt in the face of the (almost) incomprehensible. Massiveness and chaos in nature and as represented in art inspires a quickening of the mind resulting in an affirmation of man's eminence and central position in the cosmos. Beauty on the other hand is more passive and restful. It does not extend the mind in the same way. It is rather a demonstration of taste, refinement, civilization, and the significance of the intellect. Working down the line, as it were, craft and embroidery are unavoidably mediated by necessity, and can, therefore, only charm and

provide for material existence.

Kant implies a hierarchy of experience and phenomena. He distinguishes between the formal and the limitless, the mental and the sensory, reason and understanding. The sublime represents the pinnacle of experience, it is formless and intellectual. It enhances man's knowledge of his place in the world and the (cognitive) essence of his being. Beauty is formed but considered an intellectual rather than a sensory experience. Its form is almost an unfortunate by-product of its universal communicability. Embroidery and the decorative arts, because they are formed and purposive, are rooted in material, sensory experience. They, consequently, contribute nothing beyond their specific purposes. The sublime is related to quantity-- a quantity that threatens to overwhelm the cognitive abilities of man. Craft cannot compete on this massive scale. Perhaps the essential difference involves the recognition that the human creator is insignificant and puny in comparison to the larger cognitive creative force of humankind. Kant notes that

> the irresistibility of the might of nature forces upon us the recognition of our physical helplessness as beings of nature, but at the same time reveals a faculty of estimating ourselves as independent of nature, and discovers a pre-eminence above nature that is the foundation of a self preservation of quite another kind from that which may be assailed and brought into danger by external nature. This saves humanity in our own person from humiliation, even though as mortal men we have to submit to external violence. In this way external nature is not estimated in our aesthetic judgment as sublime as far as exciting fear, but rather because it challenges our power (one not of nature) to regard as small those things of which we are wont to be solicitous (worldly goods, health, and life), and hence to regard its might (to which in these matters we are no doubt subject) as exercising over us and our personality no such rude dominion that we should bow down before it (§28, 1984, p.54).

Kant sets the intellectual over the sensory realm of experience effectively excluding craft from his aesthetic considerations. He is not solely to blame for the low status subsequently attributed to embroidery; nevertheless, he formalized tendencies which had been developing since the Renaissance. As with crafts, embroidery is not simply omitted from the Critique of Judgment, it is fundamentally precluded.

which had been developing since the Renaissance. As with crafts, embroidery is not simply omitted from the Critique of Judgment, it is fundamentally precluded.

Figure 6. Making use of the last rays of sunlight, phulkari embroiderers sit outside stitching in Patiala, Punjab. Not being able to afford to purchase their own materials, they are supplied with cloth and thread and paid per motif stitched.

Chapter 4
Feminist Critiques: Craft and Knowledge, Women and Embroidery

I introduced this thesis by discussing some of the questions I had and frustrations I had experienced as a craftsperson working with textiles. I felt my skills and tacit knowledge of textiles were not as highly valued as other skills and more abstract forms of knowledge. This experience spawned my interest in feminism as indeed it has for many women. The experience of marginalization and trivialization is responsible for feminism and is at the core of feminist critiques of art history, science, and philosophy. Experience itself has played an increasingly important role in the maturation of feminist thought and, as I will discuss in Chapter 5, potentially offers new insights and methods for the study of textiles and women. In the order of my own developing awareness of feminism, in this chapter I examine the evolution of feminist critiques of art history, science and philosophy, before examining their impact on the study of embroidery.

Feminist Art and Craft

By the end of the 1960's many pro-feminist art groups were protesting the underrepresentation of women in public and commercial galleries (Alloway, 1979; Gouma-Peterson & Mathews, 1987). Driven by anger and a sense of the shared oppression of women, feminists organized separate women's exhibitions. Challenging the universal authority of art history, others sought to recover women artists lost in history and rewrite art history so as to incorporate women and acknowledge their contributions (see Gouma-Peterson & Mathews, 1987; Nochlin, 1971).

Many feminist artists and critics believed in the ability of art to promote, even engender feminist consciousness. Consequently, they explored what they hoped would be feminist aesthetics (Gouma-Peterson & Mathews, 1987) . This was largely characterized, as in the work by Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago, as art with circular imagery, having a central focus or orifice often in shades of pink (see Alloway, 1979). Others examined female archetypes such as goddesses, and mothers as well as women's traditional involvement in domestic pursuits (Gouma-Peterson & Mathews, 1987).

Another characteristic of this early movement was the examination of other culture's artistic traditions and the roles that women play in them in order to better understand the nature of women's art. A special edition of the feminist journal Heresies (1978) focused specifically on women's "traditional" arts cross culturally and the politics of aesthetics. It illustrates both the anger and the hope of many feminist art makers and scholars of the time. In the introductory article, tellingly entitled "The aesthetics of oppression," Friedlander wrote,

> while feminist artists continue their struggle to change cultural definitions and thereby gain entry into the male-dominated world of the fine arts, some are also trying to open the Academy to work usually associated with the "inferior" crafts or simply with the domain of women's work. In the process, they have been collecting the nearly forgotten traditions of women in rural America and abroad, creating a specifically female folk culture by bringing to light previously unrecognized skills of unknown

> women who never had the chance to specialize. *Given feminist consciousness, we can hope that those who produce the recently recognized art will emerge from obscurity as individuals, instead of being reduced to the collective anonymity so characteristically the fate of traditional artists* [italics added]. Still, lingering questions must be raised, for it is not entirely clear that we see what our interest in folk art may mean for those women who happen to be carrying on our timeless authentic female culture (Friedlander, 1978, p.4).

Friedlander's comments illustrate the ideal, common of the period, that 'woman' is a universally given entity . The rational goes that, since we are universally 'women,' 'their' experiences must be like 'ours'. Consequently, "given feminist consciousness" (once 'they' become as liberal and enlightened as 'we'), 'they' will realize that what they are making is art. In Chapter 2 I discussed the imposition of Western ideals on non-Western arts, and the presumed authority of Western art historians to judge, legitimate, and determine. Clearly, Friedlander is reproducing, albeit altruistically, the authority of Western art history.

Recalling the universalism of an earlier generation of 'armchair' anthropologists, Teilhet noted later in the same volume of Heresies,

> the disparities of style, technique, and media between men and women artists appear to be universal. In most cultures women are rarely allowed to make anthropomorphic or zoomorphic forms; these are the prerogative of men. In most cultures women are rarely permitted to make objects requiring the knowledge of ritual process or the skill and knowledge of manipulating certain specialized tools. And there seems to be a universal taboo against women's sculpting in hard materials such as wood, bone, ivory, stone, gold and metal compounds; these materials are used exclusively by men. Women can work only with soft, malleable materials: clay, gourds, basketry, leather or weaving. We can therefore say that a distinction exists (in traditional nonliterate societies) between the arts made by men and women (Teilhet, 1978, p.97).

Summing up the arguments for an "authentic female culture" put forth in this volume, it is clear that crafts, folk arts, and domestic pursuits (including cooking) were presumed to be universally feminine and an index of their shared oppression (see also Alloway, 1979). Of these, needlework and embroidery were seen as quintessentially so.

Figure 7. Commercial phulkari embroiderers in Patiala, Punjab.

The world-wide prevalence of this association of women and stitching was seen as evidence of their universal experience and heritage as women.

> Women have always made art. But for women the arts most highly valued by male society have been closed to them for just that reason. They have put their creativity instead into needlework arts which exist in a fantastic variety wherever there are women, and which in fact are a universal female art form transcending race, class and national borders. Needlework is the one art in which women controlled the education of their daughters and the production of art, and were also the critics and audience... it is our cultural heritage (Mainardi, 1973/1982, p.330).

This sentiment was echoed by Maines.

> No known culture has ever excluded women from the needle arts; some, like the Inuit of North America, have reserved textiles as the exclusive province of women. Its traditional association with the female role, especially in western society, guarantees its innocuous facade to the male community. Furthermore, it is so ubiquitous in both primitive and advanced societies, that men tend to filter it out at a very low level of consciousness. Since men are not now and seldom have been educated in the complex language of needlework symbology, any message transmitted in a textile medium was almost completely safe from falling into the wrong hands. We therefore find stunningly honest and forthright statements in needlework, delivered to us across time, space and cultural barriers, on every subject from politics to sex. The decodification of this enormous body of precious documentation has barely begun; needlework has very few secondary sources and even fewer scholars. Many art historians still do not believe that textiles can provide the kind of social, psychological, political and sexual information that is needed for a structured history of women's aesthetic thought (Maines, 1974-75. p.2).[12]

Rosaldo (1980) noted that gender is culturally constructed and must be examined contextually. While many of the scholars cited above would endorse this view of 'woman' and its implications for art and craft-- their agenda revolved around the exploration of universal gender differences, not culturally relative ones.

> We must remember that it was the Western world--mainly via male anthropologists and art historians-- that introduced the concept of "art" to nonliterate cultures, and determined what would qualify as "art," with until recently, little corroboration from the indigenous people themselves. The issue here, however, is not whether we accept the objects produced by

> women as "art," but why most women were and are traditionally denied access to the specialized role of artist as creator of religio-political objects. The relevant factor is that however art is defined, all nonliterate cultures distinguish between the "art" produced by men and that produced by women; and this is our concern here (Teilhet, 1978, p.97).

Contemporary feminists, especially non-Western feminists, have critiqued the assumption of kinship and shared experience of oppression that 'unites' women of the first and third worlds. They claim that feminists of the first world attempt to appropriate the histories and achievements of non-Western women, using them to their own (Western) ends. In so doing, the criticism continues, first world feminists are reenacting patriarchy and colonialism (see Mohanty, 1988; Amos & Parmer, 1984; Lazreg, 1988; Rosaldo, 1980). Moreover, Western feminism is criticized for being romantic and naive. Amos and Parmer write

> internationally, while Black and Third World women are fighting daily battles for survival, for food, land, and water, western white women's cries of anguish for concern about preserving the standards of life for their children and preserving the planet for future generations sound hollow. Whose standards of life are they fighting to preserve?--white middle-class standards undoubtedly (Amos & Parmer, 1984, p.17).

These critiques point to a dilemma central to the notion of feminist aesthetics and the idea that crafts are inherently feminine. Embroidery, for example, is both the sign and the symptom of women's oppression-- it expresses their femininity while consequently delimiting it.[13] Assumptions based on some inherently feminine quality of craft are exposed as essentialist by Alloway, who notes that

> such techniques are in broad use among men *and* women at present but can be programmatically associated with women because of their traditional domestic applications. Many working with these means do construe a kinship with their female ancestors or with third-world women-that is, with women in whose lives these operations really are (or were) fundamental (Alloway, 1979, p.71).

Many contemporary craftspeople are lured more by the 'primitive' appeal of craft than its utility he argues. This betrays the prevalence, the preference even, for the untamed,

uncivilized aspects of craft and recalls the stereotyped noble savage, or primitive 'other' I discussed in Chapter 2.

On a more pragmatic note, embroidery has been seen as a way of employing women, of providing a virtuous, though meagre, means of employment during the nineteenth century (Parker & Pollock, 1981; Parker, 1984; Callen, 1979). In the twentieth century textile crafts are seen as appropriate means of providing employment for women in underdeveloped countries (not the West)-- employment that does not challenge normative gender-labour patterns overtly. Craft is seen as a way of 'using up' surplus labour, and of providing employment without high capital investment (see Momsen, 1991; Taimni, 1981). Many of these projects target women and involve textile crafts (Nelson & Saunders, 1986; Gladhart & Gladhart, 1981; Berik, 1989)-- in India, lacemaking, applique, patchwork and embroidery have been promoted (Mies, 1982; Dhamija, 1981; Jalees, 1989; Bhatt, 1989; SEWA,[14] 1990;1991). Nevertheless, Dhamija questions the imposition of these so-called "feminine crafts."

> Their femininity lies primarily in the fact that they are essentially time consuming, provide little income, and are not easily upgraded to yield a higher price. These crafts rarely prove to be a stepping stone into a small-scale industry that would offer greater incomes to women. When such activities are commercialized, the more remunerative part of the work generally is taken up by men[15] (Dhamija, 1981, p.196).

In India *prasad* refers to an offering of food made to a deity then distributed amongst worshipers, bestowing the blessings of that deity-- sort of 'holy leftovers' (Pocock, 1973). Craft is like prasad in as much as it is a form of production left over, unnecessary and unwanted by the industrially satiated West. Embroidery is even more of a 'left-over' and one whose questionable 'blessings' are bestowed on women.

Gradually the romantic essentialism of feminist aesthetics has given way, on the one hand, to culturally relative discussions of women's relationship with textiles (Niessen, 1988), and on the other, to discussions of art and ideology. Nochlin's article "Why have

there been no great women artists?" (1971), is still timely and provocative. She was perhaps the first feminist scholar to critically examine the accepted canons of Western art history and the social context of art production. Nochlin disassembled the question "Why have there been no great women artists?" in order to expose the assumptions upon which it is based. She notes that in relation to this question,

> the feminist's first reaction is to swallow the bait, hook, line and sinker, and to attempt to answer the question as it is put: i.e., to dig up examples of worthy or insufficiently appreciated women artists throughout history... But they do nothing to question the assumptions lying behind the question "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" On the contrary, by attempting to answer it, they tacitly reinforce its negative implications (Nochlin, 1971, p. 23).

She notes further that the question

> "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" is simply the top tenth of an iceberg of misinterpretation and misconception; beneath lies a vast bulk of shaky *idées reçues* about the nature of art and its situational concomitants, about the nature of human abilities in general and of human excellence in particular, and the role that the social order plays in all of this (Nochlin, 1971, p.24).

One of these assumptions is the notion of the "great" artist discussed in relation to Kant in the last chapter. Because of art history's emphasis on the achievements of (male) artists rather than the social factors contributing to their success, art history is seemingly a progression of magically endowed individuals. Individuality and uniqueness became increasingly valued in art and artists as I discussed in relation to the development of aesthetics in the last chapter. With shifts from feudalism to capitalism, cooperative or holistic technologies to prescriptive ones, and ecclesiastical to secular arts, the mark or signature of the artist himself became important. His characteristic stamp on the work of art attested to its uniqueness and originality and consequently to the progressiveness Kant sought to demonstrate.

> Accounts of modern art history are often exclusively, even obsessively, concerned with documenting and explicating evidence of innovation-- the

> formal inventiveness of this or that work, the uniqueness of its iconography, its distinctive use of symbols or unconventional materials. The presence of innovation makes a work ideologically useful because it demonstrates the artist's individual freedom as an artist; and *that* freedom implies and comes to stand for human freedom in general. By celebrating artistic freedom, our cultural institutions "prove" that ours is a society in which all freedom is cherished and protected, since, in our society, all freedom is conceived as individual freedom (Duncan, 1973/1993, p.82).

Given the individualism privileged by the West, women's absence from art history, their remaining unknown and undistinguished, was considered 'proof' that they were not capable of greatness or art (Nochlin, 1971, p.28). Women, embroidery, and the "primitive" arts could not meet the standards set for demonstrating "freedom," individuality, and uniqueness. These standards were artificially set, tautological, and socially constructed so as to fundamentally exclude them, just as Kant's discussion of aesthetics fundamentally excluded craft. Because embroidery and other textile arts are labour intensive, they are slow to produce and change (see Bird, 1960). They are often seen as bound by tradition and therefore, to borrow from Kant, neither free nor disinterested. Moreover, as (sometimes) cooperative acts, the mark of the individual is obscured and compromised.[16]

Duncan notes that,

> more and better criticism within established modes-- old art history with women added-- these are not real solutions. The value of established art thinking and how it functions as ideology must be critically analyzed, not promoted anew (Duncan, 1975/1993, p.131).

Consequently, more recent feminist scholars have questioned the possibility of working within the established paradigms of art history (Gouma-Peterson & Mathews, 1987). Just as feminist aesthetics have been replaced by discussions of the representation of women (Duncan, 1973/1993), so the debates over the relative status of women's arts have been largely supplanted by examinations of power structures and ideology. Gouma-Peterson & Mathews (1987) have suggested that Parker and Pollock's book Old

Mistresses: Women, Art, Ideology (1981) is responsible for this fundamental new direction in feminist art scholarship.

> They turned to an analysis of women's historical and ideological position in relation to art, art production, and artistic ideology as a means to question the assumptions that underlie the traditional historical framework (Gouma-Peterson & Mathews, 1987, p. 328).

Parker and Pollock proposed that the association of women and embroidery was culturally and ideologically determined. They note that the evolving social, economic, and political situation of women since the nineteenth century, manifested as natural femininity (see also Parker, 1984) as well as "divinely ordained domesticity" have subjected women to increasingly complex constraints. In contrast to the view that women artists had existed but somehow remained unknown or outside the legitimate ken of art history, they propose a more culturally relative,

> varying history in which at different periods the factors of sex, class, and dominant forces in art, together with the changing identity of the artist, have produced distinct and differing possibilities for women's practice (Parker & Pollock, 1981, p.170).

Figure 8. Hindu Harijan mother and child in Hodka, Banni District, Kutch. The woman is wearing a blouse of intricate embroidery and mirrors. The baby is nestled on a locally made quilt.

'Knowing' Women and Science

Where Parker and Pollock began with "the sex of the artist matters" (Parker & Pollock, 1981, p.50), Code continued with the sex of the knower is **epistemologically** significant (Code, 1991, p.26). She exposes, at a deeper level, the "complex constraints" which have prevented women's participation and recognition within, not only the arts, but science and philosophy as well.

The development of feminist critiques of science and philosophy generally mirrors that of art history discussed above. Like the underrepresentation experienced by women artists in the 1960's, feminists' critiques of science began with the recognition that women's experiences were not represented by a science professing to speak universally. The first wave of feminism subsequently introduced women as worthy *objects* of study. It encouraged reflection on the nature of women's experience and the source of their oppression. With the recognition that women's voices were seldom heard or their interests always protected, feminists began to challenge the hegemony of the dominant discourses (Harding, 1990). The second wave of feminism began to expose the insidious implications of patriarchy and question whether these established modes of thought could accommodate women. Together with postmodernism, feminist critiques have turned to deconstructions aimed at dismantling the mechanisms of exclusion and insist on women not just as *subjects* of knowledge, but **subjects of knowledge construction** (Harding, 1987; Gross, 1986; Code, 1991).

Feminists have critiqued both the form and the content of science and philosophy. Code (1991) notes, for example, that an abstract, rational, individualistic model for the production of knowledge was promoted by Descartes. Anticipating Kant, Descartes believed that "sensory experiences had the effect of distracting reason from its proper course" (Code, 1991, p.5). Descartes' imposed division of man and nature, mind and body, objectivity and subjectivity is reiterated by Kant's intellectualist formalism. Pure, objective form is tainted by interest, function, process, or decoration. Mathematics

provided Descartes' inspiration for a rational scientific objectivity. It became his paradigm of knowledge acquisition and explanation (Urmson & Rée, 1989)

The scientific method, based on objectivity, insists on distance between the subject and the object of investigation. Knowledge is acquired, discovered by the objective observer. The scientist's dispassionate gaze presumes knowledge is found 'out there' not 'in here' and thus is bias free. Corroborated evidence implies universal truth, rules, and predictability. Feminists have critiqued the assumed purity and objectivity of science and the scientific method-- betrayed by the exclusion of women from its ranks (Harding, 1987). Women's experiences or the possibility of their knowledge is ignored or dismissed by science. Traditionally viewed as based on sensory experience and emotions, women's knowledge was considered inherently and inevitably subjective and non-scientific. Code notes that

> the withholding of authoritative epistemic status from the knowledge *women* have traditionally constructed out of their designated areas of experience affords a peculiarly salient illustration of gender politics at work. `Gossip,' `old wives tales,' `women's lore,' `witchcraft' are just some of the labels patriarchal societies attach to women's accumulated knowledge and *wisdom*... Its subjugation and trivialization can be explained only in terms of the structures of power and differential authority encoded in the *purity* demanded by ideal objectivity. This knowledge cannot attain that standard, the supposition is, because it grows out of experiences, out of continued contact with particularities of material, sensory objects- and it is strongly shaped by the subjectivity of its knowers: women (Code, 1991, p.68,69).

Consequently, the dichotomy of experience which is the ideological heritage of science, philosophy and art pits subject against object, body against the mind, manual work against intellectual work, craft against art and woman against man.

Code (1991), Franklin (1990a; 1990b), and Hawkesworth (1989) reject this dichotomizing as did Rosaldo (1980) earlier. They argue for a re-evaluation of the role and value of subjectivity and responsibility in, not the discovery, but the **construction** of knowledge. They argue for a situated understanding, a culturally relative understanding

of gender and how women have (or have not) been recognized as 'knowers.' Code proposes

> that knowledge is, necessarily and inescapably the product of an intermingling of subjective and objective elements... I maintain that it is a mistake to read 'subjective' as a pejorative term, yet that it is equally mistaken to underrate the epistemic value of objectivity... A viable theory of knowledge that is in touch with the diversity of cognitive experiences has no place for the standard objective/ subjective dichotomy, nor for any other dichotomy according to which knowledge is *better* to the extent that it is purely rational, theoretical, abstract, or universal (Code, 1991, p.30).

This challenges not only the hegemonic authority of science to determine truth, but of art history to determine art. It exposes them for the political instruments, the justificatory strategies, they have been.

Where earlier feminists promoted a un form woman's experience, this perspective recognizes women's experiences. Uniformity is replaced by multiple ways of knowing, and being in the world. While this further erodes the hegemonic authority of science and philosophy, it is also important in the understanding and appreciation of embroidery. Where discussions of embroidery have been restricted to descriptions of its physical, objective characteristics, recognition that women are knowledgeable presupposes that embroidery is a manifestation of that knowledge, not simply decorative.

Anthropologists readily acknowledge the cultural integrity of objects, or rather the integrity of the *subjects* of culture. Nevertheless, as Weiner so poignantly demonstrated in Women of Value: Men of Renown (1976), women's cultural productions and transactions, women's contributions to the physical and metaphysical well-being of their families, have often been ignored or overlooked by male-stream anthropologists. Whereas the ideal of individualism characterizes discussions of art history, the individual, particularly if she is a woman, has often been absent from ethnographic accounts. While rejecting the judgments made by art history on account of

a work's 'uniqueness', the lives and achievements of individuals are nevertheless important to understanding.

Weiner's discussion of Trobriand women (1976) concentrates on the exchange of banana fibres and the implications this has for women's roles in Trobriand society-- a role that is expressed through the accumulation of goods and the power they afford. Trobriand culture is represented as a unified whole where both men and women contribute (even if Malinowski did not recognize the fact). My point of departure is the examination of embroidery, not only as a functioning phenomenon of culture, and therefore subsumed by culture, but as motivated by women who support, subvert, or manipulate culture. Embroidery, consequently offers them a site, chosen by some, imposed on others, that expresses not decorative "instincts," but conscious aesthetic choices and situated knowledge. This approach acknowledges women's agency as individuals, who are historically and culturally relevant.

Science as a model of knowledge production, privileging objectivity over subjectivity, has proven inadequate for understanding certain human processes. These include craft and embroidery (see also Code, 1991, for others). Science and the discourses modelled after science explain the object or the act of embroidery in an objective and therefore, superficial way. Recalling my definition that embroidery is act and object, infused with meaning and function, I propose that the significance of embroidery is necessarily obscured by these discourses.

Crafts are increasingly being seen as 'feminized' forms of production (marginalized, trivialized, domesticized etc.) (Halpin, 1994). Although closely associated with women across many if not most cultures, embroidery's declining status is not to be explained as being feminine or feminized. This implies some indissoluble link between oppression and femininity, a link which is tenuous, shortsighted, and dangerously essentialist. Others claim that activities historically accessible to women (namely embroidery) have been devalued because of this association and the socio-cultural ideas

they are embedded in (see Nochlin, 1971; Gouma-Peterson & Mathews, 1987; Parker & Pollock, 1981; Parker, 1984). Neither embroidery nor craft are inherently feminine, nor are women automatically (biologically) subordinate. If they appear so, it is because of the many material, economic, political and cultural forces which impinge on them.

Embroidery, when it has been examined, has been discussed as a representation of something else, as a sign, a symbol, a craft, sometimes an art, a symptom, or an index. But it is more than these-- it matters. It matters to the women who continue to make it and those who continue to use and value it. What is absent from the literature on Indian embroidery is the recognition that it has meaning, particularly for Indian women. It is an expression, a manifestation of their knowledge. Evidence for this is not yet available in the literature on Indian embroidery, nor many of the art historical accounts of embroidery. Nevertheless, that embroidery has epistemic and ontological value is suggested by those few scholars who have examined embroidery contextually.

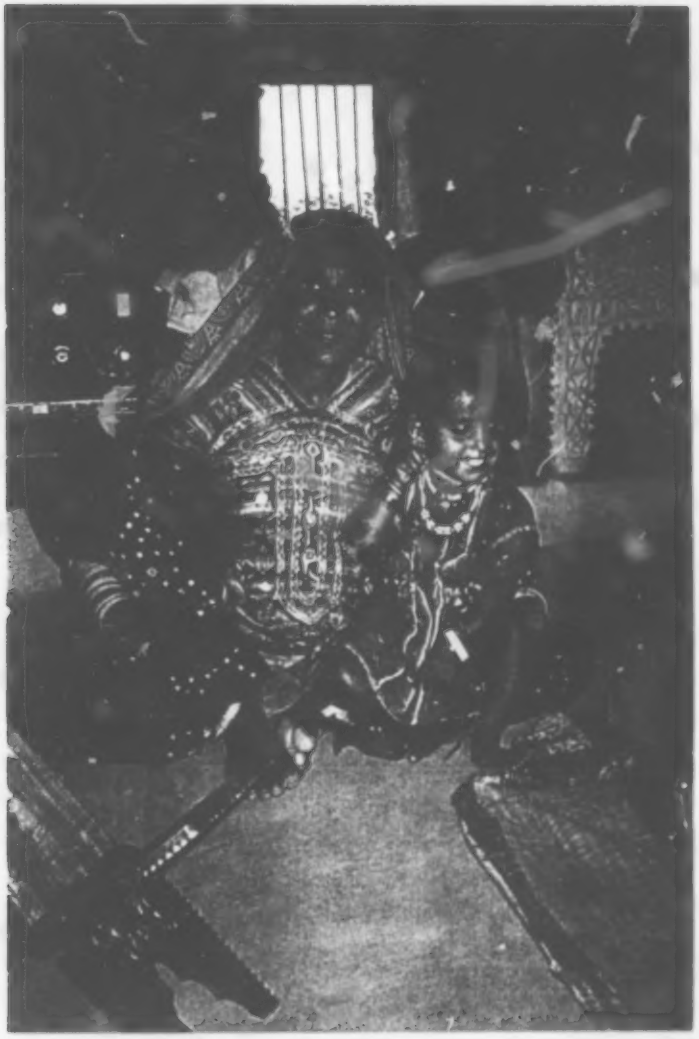

Figure 9. A Hindu Harijan woman and child photographed in Ludai, Banni District, Kutch. She wears an embroidered blouse with mirrors. The baby girl wears a dress with machine embroidery and purchased trim. In the left foreground is a book stand characteristic of those carved by the local men.

Chapter 5
Methods of Study: The Embodied Embroiderer

Feminism and Research

Embroidery is an example of what Franklin (1990a) has called a "holistic" form of technology. Like the crafts of the potter, metalsmith, and weaver, the embroiderer is empowered through maintaining control over the production process. Unlike these other crafts, embroidery requires little complicated equipment or materials-- just needles, thread and fabric. As its basic means, stitching is beautifully spontaneous and graphically unhindered as opposed to the greater constraints placed, for example on weaving, by the warp and weft. Stitching and weaving involve repetition yet unlike each pick, each stitch is formed by hand. It is an involved repetition where the speed, skill, and care of the stitcher are evident in each stitch. Each stitch is, moreover, imbued with meaning. How to explicate this meaning is the subject of this chapter.

In previous chapters I have examined how embroidery has been **ideologically dismissed**. This is reflected in the approaches most commonly used to study embroidery. These often focus on the description of physical characteristics and techniques and betray a Kantian ideal of pure, universal form and the positivistic objectivity of science. A more contextual approach, akin to that taken by anthropologists, aims not at description so much as understanding (see Holy, 1984; Geertz, 1973). This approach aims at understanding 'why' as opposed to simply 'what' or 'how.' It acknowledges that art and artists, material culture and craft, are embedded, materially and ideologically, in social process and culture. Understanding is therefore possible only in light of the choices and values possible at that time and place.

A contextual approach examines material culture, as much as possible, from the perspective of the 'other.' This suggests alternative, culturally relevant histories of art and culture (see Phillips, 1989). A more contextual approach seeks to understand the

multifarious ways an object functions within a culture. It is therefore resistant to the stereotyping and generalizing which have characterized art history (see Chapter 2) and (early) anthropology (see Holy, 1984).

A contextual approach to the study of textiles reveals the intimate and significant ways in which textiles are used and have meaning to different cultural groups. In "The Anthropology of Cloth" (1987) Schneider surveys the field of textile studies, suggesting the relevance and dimensions of a contextual approach. Textiles are implicated politically, economically, and cosmologically. Woven textiles, for example, are demonstrated to have mythic significance and are implicated in the production and reproduction of life (Niessen, 1985). Their exchange is governed by kinship networks (Adams, 1980), the demands of indigenous (Spooner,1986) or more distant markets (Irwin, 1959; Gittinger, 1982). They are signs of status, wealth, and authority (Cohn, 1989) or a site and symbol of struggle (Bayly, 1986; Bean, 1989). Messick (1987), proposes that women's weaving involves gestures of resistance, while Dilley (1987) demonstrates men's social and ritual incorporation through weaving knowledge. Thus a contextual approach is broad, even ideological.

More specific is the interpretive anthropology of Clifford Geertz. It involves explicating the meaning of the webs of significance humans have, themselves, spun (1973, p.5). Geertz discusses the distinction between "thin" and "thick" description. The former not only characterizes early anthropological accounts (Frazer, 1915/1964) but much of art historical research as well. Thick description involves "sorting out the structures of signification... and determining their social ground and import" (Geertz, 1973, p.9), and is therefore contextually sensitive. Ethnographers, "born omniform" (Geertz, 1980, p.167), must adapt their methods to "accommodate a situation at once fluid, plural, uncentered, and ineradicably untidy" (Geertz, 1980, p.166).

> What the ethnographer is in fact faced with-- except when (as, of course, he [sic] must do) he is pursuing the more automatized routines of data

> collection-- is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render. And this is true at the most down-to-earth, jungle field work levels of his activity: interviewing informants, observing rituals, eliciting kin terms, tracing property lines, censusing households... writing his journal. Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading of") a manuscript-- foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in **transient examples of shaped behavior** (emphasis added) (Geertz, 1973, p.10).

The literature on Indian embroidery has remained dominated, intellectually and discursively, by scholars who have ignored its cultural context, ignored the example of Geertz, and the significance of the textile studies presented by Schneider (1987). The more contextual approach adopted by some (non-Indian) embroidery scholars, involves thick description and recognizes embroidery as a **subject of culture** rather than some vague representative of European expansion, colonialism, or the supremacy of Western fine arts. While promising, these embroidery accounts hardly illustrate the same breadth of context or significance demonstrated by Schneider (1987). What emerges from this (preliminary) contextualized discussion of embroidery is its close connection to women. In many cultures embroidery and stitchery are implicated in what it means to be a woman and to be a *good* woman (Vexler, 1976; Fitzhugh & Kaplan, 1982; Fienup Riordan, 1988). Eger (1978) discusses the options available to the Huichol Indians of Mexico to "complete" themselves-- to achieve a position of esteem both in the physical and metaphysical worlds. Women's path to completion is through their artwork: embroidery being a notable option. A *good* woman thus excels at embroidery, not simply through technical virtuosity or reproducing certain basic patterns, but by learning to bring the power of the supernatural into their stitching (Eger, 1978). The embroiderer's creativity, is consequently situated within the context of Huichol life and cosmology. Chaussonet (1988) takes a similar approach in discussing the spiritual and material protection

provided by Eskimo women stitchers of Alaska. Traditionally, their sewing skills were crucial to the success of men's hunting and consequently their survival and reproduction. Their embroidery and sewing skills attempted to honour both spirits and game (Chaussonet, 1988). A similar approach reveals how Palestinian women's stitching reflects their cultural traditions and Palestinian identity (Weir, 1989). Their stitching honours the patriarch, the family, the state, and reflects their economic and social power.

A contextual approach is nothing new to anthropology, nor is it unknown to art history (Hauser, 1951). Its influence has, however, more often been seen as antithetical to the project of art history. Price notes that

> a gap of monumental proportions is created between the commonly perceived *raison d'être* of art historical and anthropological research. If the value of art history is seen as diluted by attention to the integration of art into "daily life,"... the value of anthropology may be seen as largely confined to it (Price, 1989, p.98).

As a result of recent feminist and postmodernist criticisms, however, the social or contextual is gaining new impetus and importance among art historians (Rees & Borzello, 1986; Phillips, 1989). The craft perspective I am proposing marries the benefits of a contextual, self consciously anthropological perspective, with the aims (if not the means) of art history. While rejecting the ethnocentric, patriarchal biases of art history discussed in Chapter 2, I embrace the study of artistic production, of visual expression. A craft perspective flaunts the idea of function-- the idea which has historically and arbitrarily segregated craft and art (see Chapter 3). A craft perspective aims to examine embroidery as a functioning, expressive act and object, produced (intentionally) by situated individuals. This is not to promote a 'parallel' history of specific craftspeople, but a cultural history of collective individuality. This is not about 'adding' crafts (or women) to art history, but about dismantling a hegemonic, patriarchal art history. **My craft perspective involves examining the creation of embroidery, its production and meaning, by culturally, temporally located, embodied embroiderers.**

A craft perspective is contextual and "thick" in the sense that Geertz's interpretive anthropology is. Its aims are, however, more feminist. It is driven by the necessity of demonstrating the integrity of embroidery and embroiderers. Moreover, it is attuned to the political and ideological forces which have dismissed craft and embroidery as feminine, frivolous and of little epistemic value. It takes seriously that which has more often than not escaped notice or conviction.

> Such an approach would entail designing and revising the research questions, the protocol, the procedures and the modes of observation, the controls and the tests in conjunction with the subjects of the study. Subjective and possibly irreproducible observations- headaches, blurred vision, unusual behavior of men or beasts- would have to be taken seriously. Then, the subject of the research, not the researcher, would be called upon to verify how representative his or her experiences are (Franklin, 1990b, p.A14).

Reinharz notes that the methods of feminist ethnography "focus on interpretation, rely on the researcher's immersion in the social setting, and aim for **intersubjective understanding** between researchers and the person(s) studied" (emphasis added) (Reinharz, 1992, p.46). This is hoped by feminists to more equitably and accurately reflect their experiences (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991, p.89). Consequently

> the best feminist analysis... insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of research. That is, the class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviours of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint (Harding, 1987, p.9).

The intersubjectivity embraced by my craft perspective rejects the dichotomizing, dualism promoted by science as well as its presumed authority to determine truth. It promotes the joint construction of, and responsibility for, knowledge. It encourages a more equitable distribution of power, one that shares the power to determine and name that art history and science have taken for granted as their exclusive purview. It is potentially a more equitable and humane approach to research where the distance between researcher

and researched-- a distance which has prevented moral responsibility in the past-- is reduced (Franklin, 1990a;1990b).

Criticisms of Geertz's interpretative approach involve the lack of a means for the verification of his interpretations (see Shankman, 1984). An intersubjective approach challenges the authority to make interpretations divorced from those of the subjects. An enhanced recognition of the integrity of one's subjects, inherent to the intersubjective craft approach, suggests the embroiderers themselves as the means of verification and justification.

My questions posed in the preface of how to know other craftswomen and understand how they work, reemerge. In order to understand Indian embroidery I cannot ignore the embroiderers; to do so would be to reenact their colonization. How can I, the researcher, know these Indian embroiderers intersubjectively and approach an understanding of their motives for embroidering? How can I begin to make sense of the web of cultural influences, the contexts which impinge on their embroidery? How can I understand how they are for themselves, in their own terms?

At the core of an intersubjective approach to research are two problems. How can I know the 'other,' and is this knowledge destined to remain intensely (even personally) relativistic? Knowing the 'other' precipitates the discussion of phenomenology and embodied knowledge which follows in the next section. With respect to the latter problem, Young warns of the limitations of strict cultural relativism (and, consequently, the threat of subjectivism). He suggests stepping back from particulars in order to see "meta-concepts" or commonalities (Young, 1994). While I have condemned art history's universalism on the grounds that it restricts discussion of art to form, a revised universalism, one based on more insightful meta-concepts, is necessary for discussion of embroidery cross culturally.

The key to both these dilemmas may be experience itself. The shared, embodied experience of embroidery discussed in the next chapter provides a means of knowing other embroiderers. The experience of embroidery may also provide the necessary links between culturally relative particulars and more global, ideological accounts. For example, I have discussed how Indian embroidery has been largely described and classified based strictly on its form, with little regard for cultural context and meaning. Description of form also characterizes embroidery literature generally. Consequently, embroidery seems static, simply decorative, and devoid of significance. An approach that involves the hands-on experience of embroidery, stands to reveal the importance of gesture and process, challenging the singularity of form as the basis of (universal) classification.

The potential benefits of such an approach are illustrated by the work of Markrich (1976), an embroiderer and author whose experience of embroidery informs her methods of teaching. Having meditated on the experiential aspects of embroidery she does not reduce it to specific stitches, but involved gestures. Her method of embroidering is as much cognitive as it is of the body and experiential. It involves her whole, knowing body. It consequently rejects the dichotomies of mind and body, objectivity and subjectivity implicit to, for example, other systems of teaching and classifying embroidery based solely on form and visual appearance (Christie, 1921; Emery, 1980).

In her book Principles of the Stitch,(1976) she offers a history of Western embroidery classification and education. She notes that prior to the industrial revolution, embroidery was learned by demonstration and that the first publications on the subject were books of illustrated patterns. With the mechanization of many hand processes and a general loss of embroidery skill, books after the turn of the 19th century began to instruct how to embroider as well as to suggest patterns and cultivate taste. How to embroider became how to reproduce a vast range of stitches-- not how, when, or why to manipulate a basic vocabulary of stitch types. Markrich notes that

> as modern innovators in an age greatly influenced by the machine, the new writers on needlework organized, analyzed, tabulated and regulated embroidery stitches within a rigid framework. To their precise minds, this seemed the only reasonable way to protect the future of needlework in a scientific-minded age. Yet they failed to see that the texts they were writing... encouraged an embroidery of rote rather than one of imagination (Markrich, 1976, p. xiv).

Markrich illustrates the increasing typification and objectification of embroidery technique in the West from the early nineteenth century-- approaches that influenced the description of embroidery and hence limited the potential of its study. Of systems of stitch classification produced since the latter quarter of the 19th century, she notes that

> instead of alphabetical listings, these books stressed line and form; stitches were classified as flat, looped, and knotted, their exact counterparts, used elsewhere on other fabrics or in other styles, were unnecessarily given different names and listed separately. This practice served not only to divide the stitches but to separate one embroidery form from another. And needlework stitches that could be adapted to any background suddenly became locked into categories (Markrich, 1976, p.xiv).

Markrich discusses the relationship of fabric and stitch, suggesting that an open, coarsely woven background fabric contributes to systematic or counted geometric designs. Finer fabrics permit curves by becoming more of a backdrop than an integral element of structure and design. Stitches are determined and varied according to their angle, tension, width, length, and relationship to one another.

Markrich identifies two main areas of stitch development and structure: running stitches and those made with circular hand motions. Running stitches are made from a line of even stitches interrupted by regular spaces. The hand moves in a single direction (towards or away from the body) with a slight alternation of the needle position. By altering the length of the stitch, its tension, and the spaces between stitches, variations including basting, darning, and 'false' satin stitches are formed. The second category of stitches is based on circular hand movements. Markrich discusses the similarity of the

movements required to produce overcasting, the stem stitch, and the back stitch. Each involve the needle moving both forward and back in a circular fashion parallel to the stitched line with only the angle of approach distinguishing them. Markrich's system of classification potentially encompasses all stitch types. There is no need to distinguish functional stitches from decorative stitches. They are all variations of the same basic, essential, hand movements.

Markrich proposes a radically different approach or system of understanding (as opposed to strictly classifying) embroidery. She is an experienced embroiderer who has reflected on what her body was doing-- not strictly on the object she was producing (what Husserl would call the phenomenological attitude, see page 86). Unlike other systems which focus primarily on appearance and form,[17] Markrich insists on consideration of gesture and hand movements. She introduces consideration of process, movement, time, and the relationship of stitch, fabric, and the embroiderer into her system of 'classification'. This is a system based on embodied, crafted, understanding-- not rules.

Craft involves learning specific techniques; however, at some point the craftsperson's decisions are not made objectively (strictly cognitively), but through a whole body awareness of materials and tools-- infinitesimal decisions. Skill, Markrich notes, is not about reproducing hundreds of different stitches, but in understanding and exercising the medium. Consequently, an experiential exploration of embroidery is essential if the researcher is to elicit more than just objective, observable characteristics.

Markrich illustrates the potential of an experiential approach to understanding embroidery. The inclusion of gesture provokes new insights into the nature of embroidery-- a possible "meta-concept." It suggests a means of classifying embroidery that is at once intimate and universal. It potentially avoids the imposition of (objective, patriarchal, ethnocentric) categories based strictly on form and does not damage indigenous interpretations or meanings.

The act of embroidering, its very gestures, also suggest intimate connections with other forms of cultural production. Markrich's work suggests the potency of similar gestures for classification and understanding embroidery. Others have examined the relationship between appearance and form. Lechtman (1975) and Helms (1981), for example have examined pre-Columbian metallurgical techniques, ceramics, and present day Cuna molas for evidence of the fundamentals of indigenous aesthetics. They argue that the stripping away or removal of cloth or metal to reveal otherwise hidden layers is an important component of how these peoples approach their materials and organize their world. Frame (1986) has examined Peruvian weaving, connecting the appearance of the cloth structure with decoration. These studies privilege the visual similarities of different media, phenomena called simulacra. Markrich potentially contributes to this discussion the consideration of fundamental hand movements-- movements perhaps trained by one technique or with one medium transferred to another. She suggests a simulacrum of experience or logic.

I am arguing for experience as a means of more intimately understanding embroidery and therefore reforming its cross cultural discussion. But it is also a means of understanding other embroiderers. Through the shared embodied experience of embroidery I will be able to understand the demands of the cloth, the stitches, the time, the place, and what it means to be a woman under these circumstances. This experiential knowledge is intersubjective. It challenges distinctions between the researcher and the researched, the emic and the etic, the mind and the body, the subjective and the objective. Knowledge of the other is possible, not through the domination of imposed meanings or criteria, but because these distinctions are blurred by shared, intersubjective experience. This necessitates an examination of phenomenology, the branch of philosophy which examines the role of experience in knowledge construction. Consequently, in the next section I will briefly examine the historical development of phenomenology before turning

to a discussion of its consistency with a feminist intersubjective approach. Subsequently I examine its potential for the embodied understanding suggested by Markrich above and knowing other embroiderers. In the last section of this chapter I examine the significance of this approach for ethnographic research, specifically that related to crafts and embroidery.

Figure 10. A Hindu Harijan woman near Dhordo, Banni District, Kutch appliques a panel for a quilt. These quilts are remarkable not only for their vivid designs which correspond with painted house decorations, but for their use of old, discarded materials.

Phenomenology

Definitions of phenomenology are elusive, inevitably incomplete, and dense. Natanson (1973) notes that fifty years after Husserl published his philosophical works on phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty would still question its nature. Another quarter of a century later, philosophers would still not be able to comprehensively define it. With that said, the following should be seen, less as a definition, more as a 'characterization' of phenomenology. It involves the description of objects just as one experiences them with philosophy extracted in the process (Hammond, Howarth, & Keat, 1991, p.1).

> Taken fairly literally, 'phenomenology' means 'the study or description of phenomena'; and a 'phenomenon' is simply anything that appears or presents itself to someone (and so does not involve any sense of the strange or spectacular). Thus phenomenology involves the description of things as one experiences them, or of one's experiences of things (Hammond, Howarth, & Keat, 1991, p.1).

There is a common, unreflexive, and unspecified use of the word 'phenomenology' among social scientists which is problematic. It is often used as a synonym for experience or even ethnography (see Irwin 1987:44), generalizing and glossing over its philosophical intent. Though it has influenced sociology and especially psychology it has so far had limited overt impact on anthropology. This is confirmed by Clammer (1984) and Marcus (1986), the latter of whom notes that phenomenology and other postwar Continental philosophies have only just started to influence Anglo-American social science. Similarly, neither textile studies nor feminism have explored the potential of phenomenology even though its focus would seem to be directly relevant to understanding textile producers and their techniques and is consistent with a feminist, intersubjective approach.

The history of phenomenology traditionally begins with the work of Husserl--particularly his book Cartesian Meditations, first published in 1931. Husserl contends that Descartes drew the wrong conclusions with respect to the self reflecting ego.

Descartes proclaimed a dualism of mind and body where the external world was autonomous and therefore knowable, objectively. Husserl believed in a transcendental realism in which the reflecting ego constitutes the world (Hammond, Howarth & Keat, 1991, p.5). In other words, ego's reflections play a role in creating the world-- it is subsequently not separate from him/her. This challenges Descartes' imposed division of mind and body, the same which has resulted in dichotomizing objectivity and subjectivity.

Husserl claims a unity of experience. To him individuals live in a 'taken-for-granted' lifeworld-- a condition he calls the "natural attitude" (Watson, 1976). This is then a somewhat naive, non-reflective perception of the world in which one lives-- it is only with reflection on experience that the natural attitude is transformed into the **phenomenological attitude** (Watson, 1976, p.99). This reflection involves suspension of the natural attitude as well as the reduction or discovery of **essences**. For an anthropologist this sounds somewhat familiar. The suspension of disbelief, or at least an awareness of the conceptual baggage one brings into a research situation helps the researcher approach indigenous understanding. For Husserl the essential structures of consciousness are to be based on an intuitive grasping of essences (Hultgren, 1989, p.51). They involve, therefore, reflection and interpretation. Hultgren notes that

> since essences are not seen in the sense that empirical objects are they must be brought forward through phenomenological reflection to reveal the meaning structures which are taken for granted in everyday life (Hultgren, 1989, p.51).

Experience and the everyday world take on new significance in Husserl's work. He argues for going 'back to the things themselves'. Phenomenologists are, he claims, radically empirical-- even positivistic "if by 'Positivism' we are to mean the absolute unbiased grounding of all science on what is 'positive,' ie. on what can be primordially apprehended" (Husserl in Parsons, 1988, p.19). Parsons notes that experience is the only absolute for Husserl-- it is through reflecting on experience that the essences of what is perceived to be "objective" or real are understood. He goes on to illustrate that

> reflection, for instance, on the activities of an ordinary day-- eating meals, reading books, driving a car, etc.-- demonstrates that these are neither exclusively thoughts nor things; they are intentional (ideal) experiences (real). As we are aware of living it, experience is neither thought nor matter. It is an act that includes awareness (thought) and the object (thing) within itself; consciousness is integrated into our world itself, not something distanced from it like a spectator. As we act the world becomes constituted through our experience of symbolic qualities. Hence, Husserl (§33, 1962) emphasizes that consciousness and pure experience (*Erlebnis*) are functionally equivalent (Parsons, 1988, p.21-22).

As he notes in the above quotation, experience includes both awareness and the object. Husserl's precept to return to the things themselves privileges neither objective reality nor subjective reflection-- experience does not dichotomize these things. Similarly the so-called formal properties of objects are not, according to Husserl's phenomenology, isolatable. Where the main method of the scientist has been dispassionate observation, Husserl rejects the quantification associated with this approach by acknowledging reflection and embracing qualitative methods.

> Husserl considers this question by examining Galileo's attempt to establish a 'mathematized' conception of nature, according to which the only real properties of things are those that can be measured and quantified-- the so-called primary properties such as size, shape, position, and so on. By contrast, the 'secondary' properties such as colour, taste or smell are deemed by Galileo to be unreal: they are to be understood as merely the subjective effects of the real world upon the perceiver, 'existing' only in the realm of private experience. **Against this Husserl argues that the only real properties of things are those that are experienced in everyday life, and hence include both primary and secondary qualities.** Galileo's mathematized nature must be regarded as only a (predictively useful) abstraction from the lived world which, philosophically speaking, has ontological priority (priority in its claims to existence) over the scientific world (emphasis added) (Hammond, Howarth, & Keat, 1991, p.6).

Young (1994, p.184-5) notes that theoretical physicists suspect a causal relationship between observation and probability-- in other words, at the sub-atomic level, an instrument does not simply record but creates a certain reality. This throws

doubt on the possibility of objective unbiased observation. The role experience plays and its intersubjective nature must be acknowledged if research is to avoid distortion and corruption (Irwin, 1987)-- or risk discovering only the reality it seeks. Husserl maintains that we must reflect on experience (not preconceptions) and draw conclusions from it. Parsons (1988) too, notes the necessity of arguing from experience to concept as opposed to vice versa as is often the case in science.

The phenomenology associated with Husserl is a **transcendental** phenomenology. A second stream is more **existential** and is associated with Sartre, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Of these scholars, it is the work of Merleau-Ponty that offers the greatest potential for an intersubjective study of women and embroidery.

The crucial distinction to be made between Merleau-Ponty and Husserl involves Merleau-Ponty's rejection of the transcendental ego. In his Phenomenology of Perception (1962), Merleau-Ponty criticizes Husserl's work for being intellectualist, that is, for still privileging the mind over the body. He proposes an alternative reading of Husserl's phenomenology replacing the transcendental ego with an **embodied subject** (Hammond, Howarth & Keat, 1991, p.6). Merleau-Ponty

> is equally interested in the nature of the human "subject" for whom this world exists. It is here that the more obviously existentialist character of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy emerges, with its emphasis upon active engagement in the world by individuals exercising their capacity to make choices and 'impose meanings' (Hammond, Howarth & Keat, 1991, p.6).

The main thrust of his philosophy is the study of an embodied subject living in the world. He rejects more thoroughly than Husserl the dichotomy between subject and object, mind and body, implying a greater degree of existentialism. The body itself takes on new significance for it is implicated in perception and the construction of knowledge. For example, he discusses the knowledge of the body of an organist. In approaching a new instrument, the organist does not draw up a new "mental map" consciously, but incorporates the relevant distinctions with his/her body. (Hammond, Howarth & Keat,

1991, p.178). The body of the organist understands, or knows how to make sense of a new arrangement without privileging the intellect or making use of symbolic or objectifying functions. This bodily knowledge is primary for Merleau-Ponty in the sense that it is irreducible to more basic concepts and is the basis of other forms of knowledge (Hammond, Howarth & Keat, 1991, p.179-80).

Forging a new degree of connectedness between the body and the world Merleau-Ponty rejects the dichotomies which have polarized them. The world is not something to be strictly observed and quantified, "out there." It is "in here," a part of the body, constituted and constituting. This is an inherently intersubjective approach.

> Merleau-Ponty develops a view of the human subject as essentially 'embodied,' and hence neither entirely free nor self-transparent; and of its 'world,' consisting of the intended objects of bodily action and perception, as neither fully determined, causally nor determinate ('clear cut'), and hence not straightforwardly accessible to the empirical sciences (Hammond, Howarth & Keat, 1991, p.7).

This gives rise to a philosophy of "ambiguity" characterized by the ideas that we can touch and be touched, transform and be transformed (by society). We are both in and of the world simultaneously (Bidney, 1973; Urmson & Rée, 1989). For Merleau-Ponty human existence is ontologically expressed "in the intertwining of the visible and invisible dimensions of being" (Urmson & Rée, 1989, p.200). Consequently,

> Merleau-Ponty's preference for an aesthetic reading of existence-- in terms of style and signification-- over a scientific one in terms of objects and statistics, epitomizes his conviction that truth is an ongoing project rather than a fixed possession, a task of living experience rather than a *fait accompli* (Urmson & Rée, 1989, p.200).

In practice phenomenology involves stripping away conceptual baggage and biases in order to experience more honestly and completely. It involves experiencing the world as a beginner-- free (or at least self consciously aware) of all assumptions, including those of phenomenology itself.

> The true beginner does not deny the reality of the world, nor does he [sic] place artificial strictures on what honest men accept on faith as the evident character of everyday life; but he does attempt something even more harrowing: the beginner worthy of a science of beginnings attempts to reconstruct his role in the face of a continuing effort to search out the constitutive elements of his own procedure. The phenomenologist, as beginner, will not surrender the question of his own activity (Natanson, 1973, p.7).

Phenomenology requires its practitioners

> to learn what is meant by the natural attitude, to practice *epoché*, to attempt descriptions of presentations without prejudicing the results by taking for granted the history, causality, intersubjectivity, and value we ordinarily associate with our experience, and to examine with absolute care the fabric of the world of daily life so that we may grasp its source and direction (Natanson, 1973, p.8).

Describing the fabric of everyday life through the medium of the embodied subject is explicitly the aim of Merleau-Ponty (Hammond, Howarth & Keat, 1991; Urmson & Rée, 1989). 'Description,' may not be the most accurate word to describe his methods.

> For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenological method is a process of reconciliation rather than an instrument for restricted descriptive-analytic purposes. What needs reconciling are, at first approximation, the objective world and its subjective interpretation, or more carefully and subtly understood, **the need for reconciliation is based on an effort to reconceive the fullness of the experiential world so that its apparent "exterior" is grasped in integral continuity with its human signification.** What we have referred to earlier as the principle of phenomenological isomorphism[18] is tacitly invoked by Merleau-Ponty in order to get beneath the surface distinctions of "object" and "subject," of "thing" and "meaning," which have isolated science from philosophy and given nightmares to social scientists trying to remain open to the subjective while retaining their empirical conscience. Phenomenological method as the art of reconciliation tries to bring us back to the **unity that always existed between the perceiver and the perceived** (emphasis added) (Natanson, 1973, p.28).

A philosophy of reconciliation, caring, and embodied, experiential knowledge offers great potential for the study of, not only the "fabric of the world of daily life," but the embroidery of Western India.

Situated Experience and the Body

In the first section of this chapter I examined the importance of context, thick description, and intersubjectivity. This necessitated a brief examination of phenomenology, particularly that of Merleau-Ponty, in order to demonstrate the philosophic, epistemic significance of intersubjectivity. For Merleau-Ponty knowledge is the product of embodied subjects-- it is also a rationale for knowing the 'other.' This is particularly significant in light of my aims to understand the embroidery (and embroiderers) of Western India. I, the researcher, am involved in the mutual construction, an intersubjective construction, of knowledge. My skills as a craftsperson are implicated as an embodied, experiencing participant and provide a means for mutual understanding.

This is a method that is particularly suitable to processes which are difficult to verbalize and have consequently been ignored-- processes often associated with women and embroidery. Where their words have remained unrecorded and their actions undecoded (as with Indian women and embroidery) an intersubjective, embodied approach to research offers data through joint, shared experience. This approach, centred in, but not restricted to, the body, offers a way of knowing the 'other,' of sharing their experiences, and consequently, of intimately approaching an understanding of how embroidery is significant to them. Consequently, it endeavours to examine embroidery not just as a symbol, a functioning member, or structural component of culture, but as an experience and manifestation of, particularly women's, knowledge. It recognizes not only *subjects* of culture, but *embodied subjects* of culture.

I began this chapter by noting the importance of cultural context to the study of material culture. This includes analysis of aspects noted earlier-- aspects which include kinship, exchange networks, power relations, and identification. These are the standard products of the main method of anthropology, participant observation. While this method involves periods of ethnographic field research-- the rite of passage of all

anthropologists (Holy, 1984)-- the intensity, or rather, the depth of that experience varies. Ideally ethnographers must attempt to place themselves in the same cultural plane as their informants/subjects.

> The actions have to be available in the same way as they are to the actors. And as they are not available to the actors by simple sense experience, they cannot be so available to the observer. Like the actors s/he too has to experience them simultaneously through the senses and through thought processes (Holy, 1990, p.29).

Holy notes furthermore, that the participant observer should become an observing participant in an attempt to eliminate the distinction between observer and the observed phenomena (Holy, 1984, p.29). This suggests a more intersubjective, phenomenological approach to ethnographic research. Research takes on a more process oriented, experiential element, one that acknowledges the experience and development of the ethnographer.

Feminism began at the moment women realized that their experiences were valid and more true than those proposed for them by patriarchal discourses. This led, as I have illustrated, to the development of intersubjective methods for both political and moral reasons. In the sense that feminism acknowledges the importance of experience, subjectivity, and especially intersubjectivity, it has much in common with phenomenology. Anthropology, while dependant on experiential methods, has not always acknowledged its debt to phenomenology or the necessity of sharing the power to interpret, intersubjectively.

> The culture as recorded by the anthropologist in his [sic] descriptive analysis is an abstraction from the lived experiences and life-styles of the subjects of a particular culture. These social and cultural anthropologists who derogate culture as an abstraction distinct from the actual behavior of man in society, as did the late Kroeber, Kluckhohn, and Radcliffe-Brown, have failed to distinguish the abstractions of the anthropologist, who provides knowledge *about* a culture, from the existential cultural experiences and processes of the subjects *of* the culture. **Anthropologists have tended to confuse the abstract, objective essence of a culture, and the concrete, subjective essence manifest in the actual social**

> **interactions of individuals in society**. If there is to be a science of cultural anthropology, then the anthropologists must refer to the existential or actual experience of the people who live by, and for, their cultural norms as the ground of reference by which to judge the truth or falsity of the cultural constructs (emphasis added) (Bidney, 1973, p.133-134).

Hence, anthropologists have privileged cultural abstractions over the lived experience of the subjects of culture. A more explicitly phenomenological approach involves intersubjective, embodied experience challenging this dichotomy of abstract theorizing and experience.

Burgess has noted that the researcher is the main tool or instrument of social science investigation (Burgess, 1982, p.1)-- an idea key to phenomenology. Not only does the researcher effect the researched (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983), but he or she is effected. In Young & Goulet's book Being Changed: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience, (1994) a number of anthropologists reveal how they were changed by their field experiences. These experiences ranged from embodying proper ways of walking and 'being' among the Dene (Guédon, 1994) to more extraordinary experiences of shared visions and dreams (Turner, 1994; Goulet, 1994). These are, they argue, legitimate forms of data based on shared experiences with their subjects-- data possibly not available otherwise. Their approach is radically empirical in the sense that it is based on physical and sensory experience (Young and Goulet, 1994). Suspending disbelief, sharing material and metaphysical experiences, and taking informants seriously are elements as significant to their approach as they are to phenomenology in general.

> Such an attitude expresses respect for our informants and their cultures. Moreover taking our informants seriously when they call upon us to "experience" in rituals, visions, dreams, the realities that inform their lives, allows us to go beyond describing the "obvious" aspects of a culture, to a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of those beliefs and practices that are central to the meaning system of a group (Goulet & Young, 1994, p.329).

The importance of what Merleau-Ponty would call the 'knowing' body has seldom been discussed by anthropologists; however it is very important to feminist critiques of science and philosophy (Code, 1991) and to the development of my craft perspective. With Goulet and Young (1994) it acknowledges the integrity of one's subjects. Indian folk embroiderers are, for example, legitimate knowers in their own right and bodies. This approach recognizes the 'knowingness' of our (collective) bodies and the intentionality and meaning of gestures of production. This is not to argue for a symbolic choreography of movement, but for an intersubjective approach to knowledge construction through embodied, co-experiencing subjects. The researcher is implicated by this process and becomes (not 'other,' not 'native')[19] a subject inhabiting, experiencing, the same (embroidered) plane as the Indian embroiderer.

Fundamental to the craft perspective is the embodied experience of a craft, in my case, of embroidery. The significance of craft is not to be found simply by analyzing its processes as discretely tangible steps. Nor is it to be understood by examining the finished product. The potential for an experiential understanding of craft is initiated by Coy's volume, Apprenticeship: From Theory to Method and Back Again (1989). He advocates apprenticeship (invoking lived, even embodied experience) as a valuable technique, complimenting other techniques meant to "construct as accurately as possible a description and an explanation of human experience" (Coy, 1989, p.118). He describes his own apprenticeship with a Tugen blacksmith in Kenya (one which complimented a study of the social and economic relations of blacksmiths in the region), noting how his apprenticeship taught him the techniques of blacksmithing as well as those aspects unverbalized or even secretive. Dilley (1989;1986) similarly notes the intimate, complex world opened up to him as he apprenticed with Tukolor weavers in Senegal. He notes how the process of his apprenticeship revealed intimate information about weaving knowledge interlinked with social structure and cosmology.

While a formalized apprenticeship is a suitable means of learning blacksmithing and weaving in Africa-- it may not be so in rural India where embroidery secrets and skills are not institutionalized in the same way. Rather, folk embroidery is taught within the family, often mother to daughter at the same time that other tasks are performed and meanings engendered. The embodied approach I am suggesting is more explicitly aware of the sensations of the (researcher's) body than has been the case with apprenticeship. Because of the apparent subtleties of the transmission of embroidery skills and the flexibility of its production, this may be the only way to elicit its meaning as both skill and act/object.

Jackson notes that studies involving the body in anthropology have "been vitiated by a tendency to interpret embodied experience in terms of cognitive and linguistic models of meaning" (Jackson 1983:328). He discusses the limitations of these approaches-- limitations which involve privileging verbal praxis over body praxis, the objectification of the body and dualism. Rather, he aims at grounding a phenomenology of experience within the social and material environment. He embeds body praxis in *habitus*, Bourdieu's concept of the everyday lifeworld (Bourdieu, 1972/1977), and notes the dynamic relationship between material reality and experience. The embodied experience of the everyday, of practice and "doings" offer valuable insights into these lifeworlds. Jackson notes that

> many of my most valued insights into Kuranko[20] social life followed from comparable cultivation and imitation of practical skills: hoeing on a farm, dancing (as one body), lighting a kerosene lantern properly, weaving a mat, consulting a diviner... To break the habit of using a linear communication model for understanding bodily praxis, **it is necessary to adopt a methodological strategy of joining in without ulterior motive and literally putting oneself in the place of another person: inhabiting their world. Participation thus becomes an end in itself rather than a means of gathering closely-observed data which will be subject to interpretation elsewhere** (Jackson, 1983, p.340).

Where Coy (1989) and Dilley (1989) use apprenticeship to gain information about the crafts of blacksmithing and weaving and the wider cultural sphere, Jackson (1983) notes the significance of the experiential. He rejects the division of mind and body, reflection and experience, engendered by anthropology, as well as science and philosophy. In keeping with the intersubjectivity promoted by feminism and phenomenology, he notes the importance of what the subjects of his study have to "say" about the meanings of the various rituals he observed in Africa-- recognizing that what they have to "say" involves not simply words, or text, but **actions**. This invokes gesture, the agency of his subjects, and their (as well as his) knowing bodies.

Privileging textual over oral traditions, the verbal over the non-verbal, even vision over all of the other senses, is a result of an ethnocentric Western preference for objectivity and rationalism (Niessen, 1994; Phillips, 1989; Jackson, 1983; Sudnow, 1979; Code, 1991; Ackerman, 1990). Jackson notes that

> anthropological analysis should be consonant with indigenous understanding which, in pre-literate societies, are frequently embedded in practices (doings) rather than spelled out in ideas (sayings) (Jackson, 1983, p.339).

The role of experience in scientific research has traditionally been limited to distant observation. This was thought to prevent the incursion of bias and sensory involvement. Experience as involvement (physical and emotional) taints the objective detachment necessary for determining scientific truth (Harding, 1990). Consequently, tacit knowledge, the knowledge of the body, has been dismissed as inherently subjective, feminine, and unreliable.

Criticizing the patriarchal mind set which has dismissed their skills and bodies of knowledge (not to mention their knowing bodies), feminists have challenged the hegemonic authority of science to determine the methodological criteria by which 'truth' is determined. Where texts have been privileged or, for example, men allowed to interpret women's experiences, the specificity or intent of those actions may be changed

(Hale, 1988). Women are seen as static, passive, and bound by tradition until the specificity of their experiences are realized. Recent accounts have examined, for example, how women attempt to resist domination through their weaving (Messick, 1987), through smoking, secrets and silences (Abu-Lughod, 1990), as well as through illness and spirit possession (Moore, 1993). Their experiences challenge not only existing views about them but the realms of legitimate scholarship.

Just as an experiential approach reveals the specificity of women's experiences and cultural knowledge, an embodied, experiential approach to embroidery stands poised to reveal its significance as a form of cultural knowledge. An embodied approach is particularly suitable to explicating an understanding of embroidery and women. While preferences can be noted, styles described, dowries inventoried, techniques and exchange patterns recorded-- an embodied, experiential, approach uncovers tacit, unverbalized knowledge. This hands-on, phenomenological approach to embroidery is radical in that it assumes embroidery matters and provides an intersubjective means of knowing the 'other' and their embroidery.

I have suggested that women and embroidery have been ignored by Western scholars because their forms of knowledge neither met the requirements of objective science, nor were verbalized or recorded in 'appropriate' ways. This has necessitated revisiting, revisioning a method of studying embroidery that bypasses the pitfalls of these earlier methods. While a phenomenology of embroidery has not yet been written, I believe its potential is rich and significant. The craftsperson has too long been assumed to be unknown and unknowing. As a craftsperson, I reject this characterization. My knowledge of textiles, for example, is of both the head and the hands, it is both intellectual (abstract) and experiential (concrete)-- it involves my whole, knowing body.

Embroidery, as I have proposed, is a meaningful act and object. It is largely treated in a cursory fashion for reasons I have explored throughout this thesis-- reasons which include its association with women, function, and tacit, unverbalized knowledge.

Studying embroidery as a subject of cultural process and as if it matters-- ideological positions inspired from recent feminists' critiques-- offers a means to get beneath surface impressions, assumptions, and biases and grasp its significance. A craft perspective, inspired by feminist intersubjective and phenomenological approaches to research, offers the potential to understand embroidery and other hand crafts as culturally significant acts and objects. It merges the feminist aims of intersubjectivity with the primacy of experience-- specifically a hands-on, embodied experience of embroidery. Knowledge of another embroiderer is possible, therefore, through this shared experience of stitching and being.

Figure 11. A Muslim man and woman pose in Dhordo, Banni District, Kutch. This woman wears a much longer blouse than her Hindu neighbours, reminiscent of blouse styles in Sindh. Though many of the embroidered motifs are similar to those found on the blouses of Hindu women in Banni, their arrangement and execution are nevertheless distinctive.

Chapter 6
Approaching Embroidery: The Craft Perspective

The women of Western India produce rich and intricate embroidery which is used by family members and exchanged for dowry. The visual richness of this embroidery, in apparent contrast to the poverty of its makers, remains unexplained. This richness is betrayed by literature which focuses narrowly on the description of embroidery motifs and stitches. Consequently the embroidery of Western India is rendered two dimensional, and without context, function, or meaning. Examining other embroidery traditions, I discovered that they too have been most often described or classified with little regard for their cultural context or meaning.

Based on art historical models and values, the theoretical frameworks applied implicitly to the study of embroidery have limited its understanding and contributed to the marginalization of its study. Consequently, a new, more comprehensive and explicit theoretical framework consistent with contemporary feminist and anthropological thought must be developed. Recalling the scholarly injustice Rossbach (1973) felt baskets have suffered, I echo his sentiments and argue that embroidery has also been maligned. With closer inspection (and a better framework) its significance can be revealed. The development of a theoretical framework for the study of embroidery is beyond the scope of my thesis. Based on my experience as a textile craftsperson, my first-hand observations of embroidery in Western India, and my extensive literature review, however, I have made recommendations and laid the groundwork for its development. I have initiated what I call the craft perspective, a stance of particular relevance to hand-made cultural products-- especially those associated with women and tacit, non-verbalized skills and knowledge.

This thesis began by examining several bodies of literature for their impact on women, craft, and especially embroidery. I began by discussing the power of Western art

history to name and judge. I noted that non-Western cultures neither not necessarily share Euro-American ideas about what fine art is, nor necessarily polarize the functional and the decorative. In the West, fine arts are expressive objects of contemplation, purged of necessity and function. This understanding privileges a reified, but nevertheless objective reality. As such it has a long history of development and legitimation. It has deep roots in Western philosophy and is related to the segregation and consolidation of the arts which have occurred since the Renaissance. Kant, writing in the late eighteenth century, distinguished interested and disinterested arts-- a refinement of the useful/not-useful distinction made earlier. Kant's system of aesthetics furthermore claimed a universality of experience based on form. Only if an object was disinterested (free from need or desire), and therefore universal, could it be judged beautiful. This emphasis on the formal characteristics of aesthetic objects lay the groundwork for modernism in the arts. Embroidery would have represented for Kant **interested** form that could at best be charming: never beautiful and certainly never sublime. Like craft, it is arbitrarily and fundamentally excluded from the aesthetics of modernism and the definition of fine art.

Art history, as I discussed in Chapter 2, is less interested in explaining one culture's art to another (in culturally relevant ways) than it is in determining how an object is or is not art in the Western sense. The art historical approach limits the study of embroidery to making finer, more precise distinctions and descriptions, an inductive rather than deductive process. Embroidery is discussed as if it were removed and removable from its cultural context. Privileging form or the decorative at the expense of function, prevents discussion of meaning. These studies set embroidery on a pedestal and examine it, measure it, typify it based on its objective, observable qualities. This is analysis which privileges the Kantian idea of form and distance from the culture that produced and used the object. This analysis is positivistic and empirical in privileging prescriptive technologies. In controlling interpretation, art history has, moreover,

contributed to the misrepresentation and stereotyping of other cultures and their art works.

Science, as I have shown, also maintains hegemonic authority, not on labelling art as opposed to craft, but in determining truth from untruth. Science privileges an objective approach to knowledge construction, one which claims emotions and bodily experience to be sources of bias. Consequently, after Kant, science and aesthetics dismiss bias and function as irrational and subjective. Feminist critiques of science and philosophy have exposed these preferences and examined how they have acted to exclude women from being legitimate knowledge producers.

My review of these influential bodies of literature suggests that embroidery and the crafts have not been taken seriously by scholars because of their association with women, function, holistic technologies, and tacit (as opposed to textual) forms of knowledge. Context, meaning, and indigenous interpretations are significantly absent--betraying a Western obsession with quantification as opposed to qualification. Women's realms and knowledge, grounded in domesticity and subjectivity, have pitted them against the arbitrary requirements of objectivity and science, as well as Kantian aesthetics, modernism, and fine art. Embroidery, caught in this web of femininity and materialism, has been seemingly exiguous and extraneous-- a pastime rather than a mode of production, a hobby rather than a legitimate artistic expression, a handicraft rather than an intellectual pursuit.

This literature promotes privileging objective, formal characteristics at the expense of context, meaning, function, and subjectivity. Embroidery is consequently classified or described, devoid of context and meaning. The terms of classification used, the criteria by which judgments of quality are passed, are seldom those of the groups involved, let alone the women who produce them. This effectively prevents any discussion of the 'real' relevance of embroidery. Examining context, meaning, function and subjectivity is essential, however, if the relevance of embroidery is to be revealed.

They are the factors which influence my craft perspective and the site on which to construct a theoretical framework.

The craft perspective developed in this thesis is a perspective of particular relevance to the study of embroidery. I use the term 'craft' not only for rhetorical purposes, distinguishing it from Western fine art, but to underline the processual aspect of both research and the production of embroidery-- they are both 'crafted.' I situate embroidery firmly within the realm of craft, acknowledging its tenuous place among the arts in the West and the ideological biases which have enforced this. As a craft I proclaim that embroidery is a legitimate focus for study, one with (often) particular relevance to women, and which manifests cultural knowledge.

The craft perspective recognizes not only the legitimacy of embroidery as a focus of study, but the integrity of those who produce it. It recognizes that embroiderers have agency and alternatively support or subvert cultural norms, including patriarchy. This perspective is not restricted to discussion of how embroidery is more or less an art object, but examines how it is an expression of knowledge and a tool for understanding women and culture-- a delicate and valuable tool given the historic silence of women.

The craft perspective respects the importance of the traditional means and foci of anthropological examination, while suggesting a complimentary approach meant to uncover the less tangible, unverbalized, more often ignored or overlooked aspects of culture. While anthropology advocates field experience, my perspective goes further suggesting an embodied experiential approach as both a means of knowing the 'other' and of intimately experiencing embroidery. It is this approach which distinguishes the craft perspective and represents its novel contribution to the study of embroidery. Embodied experience has had little impact on studies of ethnographic textiles and none on studies of embroidery. The importance of gesture and process are suggested and may reform the cross-cultural discussion of textiles.

In Chapter 5 I discussed the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty for whom embodied experience is key to knowing. An embodied approach to research fulfils the requirements for intersubjective research because it rejects *a priori* judgments and embraces subjectivity. It engenders a more responsible attitude towards the researched, preventing domination and colonization. An embodied researcher learns with his/her body paying attention to practice embedded in the lifeworld. This approach resists privileging one form of knowledge over another, objectivity over subjectivity, textual over oral traditions, the rational over the tacit, vision over touch, taste, smell or sound. This is an approach which involves the whole, knowing body in order to know the 'other,' not as antithetical, but as another oneself. I can know the 'other,' and engender a moral attitude due to our shared, bodily experience. This approach contests the distance and dichotomies which have precluded moral responsibility in the sciences.

In the last chapter I discussed the importance of experience in generating knowledge. I claim with Merleau-Ponty and Jackson that I can begin to know the 'other,' know embroiderers and approach an understanding of their craft, based on intersubjective embodied experience. This approach, I claim, is better suited to understanding crafts and those realms associated with women which have traditionally been denied status or recognition. It is not my aim to 'give' voice to those women who have been ignored, but to allow time, place, and openness of mind and heart to learn how to hear what they have to say. This knowledge, manifest as embroidery, both the act and the object, must be experienced if I am to avoid speaking for Indian women, imposing my values and judgments.

The anthropological interpretive approach to research encourages understanding rather than the production of rules, formulae, or superficial descriptions embedded in social process (Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Geertz, 1973; Ellen; 1984). Nevertheless, feminists have challenged anthropologists' (and others') authority to make interpretations. They are calling for more accountable research that acknowledges subjects as legitimate

knowers (Code, 1991). It remains the challenge, therefore, for ethnographers to interpret in an increasingly informed, politically aware, and sensitive manner.

A craft perspective, because it involves bodily experience can potentially uncover those areas of women's experience which have resisted articulation. The craft perspective merges feminist concerns with phenomenology and intersubjective methods. The researcher's authority to interpret is therefore checked by an intersubjectivity that respects the power of those embroiderers, and seeks their participation, and evaluation. Because their knowledge has seldom been recorded and has been dismissed by art history, science, and philosophy, I believe the more sensitive, experiential approach to research engendered by the craft perspective is needed to uncover the significance of embroidery. It stands to initiate the development of a more comprehensive theoretical framework for the study of embroidery in India and around the globe. The rich variety and intricacy of women's embroidery in Western India suggest a potent and tantalizing site for this development.

Endnotes

[1]I use the masculine "he" here for rhetorical purposes. It refers to the historic prevalence and cultural equation of artist and man (as opposed to craft and woman). Throughout the thesis I use gender neutral terms except when making similar arguments.

[2]Gabarino notes Tylor developed the concept of "survivals which became important in the evolutionary reconstruction of past societies. By survivals, Tylor meant customs or institutions that had lost their function but had been carried on into a later stage of society by force of habit" (Gabarino, 1977, p.31).

[3]Though predating Schneider's review article, Parker is conspicuously absent from the list of references cited in "The Anthropology of Cloth" (1987).

[4]Subaltern is a term associated with the Subaltern Studies Group. Guided by the work of Guha & Spivak (1988), the group advocates examination of the histories of the oppressed castes and tribal peoples of India. They propose studying from the bottom-up, rather than from the perspective of the elite classes or castes which have dominated Indian scholarship.

[5]See Lazreg (1988) for a discussion of how religion is often privileged in discussions of the 'other'-- especially Islam.

[6]*Phulkari*, meaning flower-work, is a style of Punjabi embroidery employing the darning stitch and unspun silk floss (Irwin & Hall, 1973).

[7]Graham connects the moral goodness of crafts with their technical mastery of chance. These two poles of thought have more often been polarized in discussions of craft; compare for example the idealistic romanticism of William Morris with the pragmatism of the Bauhaus.

[8]Gillot notes

> *la* Querelle des Anciens et des modernes *est le conflit, toujours actuel, des deux principes qui, depuis la Renaissance, sollicitent concurremment le génie national*: *le* principe d'Antiquité... *et le* principe de modernité... *la* Querelle *depuis la Renaissance qui donne une actualité toute nouvelle à la question de l'imitation et aux idées de progrès* (Gillot, 1914/1968, p. viii-ix).

[9]Apodictic refers to a capacity for clear and certain demonstration, something which is absolutely certain (Merriam-Webster, 1986).

[10]Simpson notes that subreption is a "substitution of a respect for the Object in place of one for the ideas of humanity in our own self-- the subject" (Simpson, 1984, p.51).

[11]Winckelmann was one of the leading proponents of classicism. He believed in a mythic Greece of pervasive beauty, grace, and harmony. He held Hellenic Greek statuary to be the epitome of beauty (Nisbet, 1985). Ironically, Winckelmann was ignorant of the fact that the statuary he so admired for its formal (snowy white) purity, had originally been polychromatic.

[12]A few scholars have and continue to accept Maines' challenge, most notably Parker and Pollock (1981), and Parker (1984) who are discussed in the text. Other scholars include Callen (1979) who reexamines the role of women in the Arts and Crafts Movement and the particular debt Morris owed his wife and daughters. Anscombe (1984) outlines the history of selected women in design, while Elinor *et al* (1987) examines the spectrum of craft in Britain, drawing on many life histories of craft makers. MacDonald (1988) offers a vivid account of the social and political history of knitting in the United States.

[13]A similar dilemma plagues Home Economics /Human Ecology-- a field dedicated to improving family life, often by optimizing women's "traditional" roles within the domestic sphere. Thompson (1988; 1989), for example, celebrates this association if not identification of women and their "traditional" domestic pursuits. Attar (1990), alternatively, condemns the field altogether for its essentialism and imposed limitations on women.

[14]SEWA is the acronym for the Self Employed Women's Association of Ahmedabad, India.

[15]That men (universally) assume the more remunerative parts of craft processes is a contentious statement. Evidence found within South Asia, however, does support it. Commercial embroidery is practiced by men in Kashmir, Pakistan, and at one time in Kutch and Sindh (see discussion of *mochi bharat* in Chapter 2). The *chikan* embroidery of Lucknow was originally produced by male Muslim professionals under court patronage, it is more recently a women's cottage industry (Paine, 1989). My own observations in Kutch in 1992 suggests that the marketing of new and used ("antique") embroidered textiles is the privilege of men while women continue to produce them.

[16]In India 'traditional' arts are often sacred in origin. The artist attempts to express not his or her personal vision, but eternal myths-- an approach not non-creative, but very different from the Western perspective. As Jhanji notes, "creativity does not lie in the crystallization of an unprecedented, unique image in a historical moment but it lies uniquely re-enacting a timeless paradigm (Jhanji, 1988, p.167). Individuals, though anonymous, play a role. "It is not their emotions as expressions of historic beings which

are important here, but they are significant only as they lend life to those legendary emotive experiences (Jhanji, 1988, p.169).

[17]Most existing stitch classifications divide stitches into categories according to their visual characteristics. Emery (1980), for example, discusses flat, looped, and composite stitches. Unfortunately, a glossary of Indian stitch terms has not been compiled nor its significance discussed despite the promises suggested by similar projects on weaving terms (Barber, 1991).

[18]Phenomenological isomorphism is based on Husserl's idea that philosophical reflections are valid in the realm of the natural attitude (the taken for granted life-world) (Natanson, 1973, p.26).

[19]Goulet and Young (1994) advocate taking one's informants' beliefs seriously, but not literally. This acceptance, they note, would be

> tantamount to going native. Similarly, to simply accept the pronouncements of structuralist-functionalists as to what spirits ultimately are is to take their view of the world literally. This acceptance is tantamount to agnosticism and/or methodological atheism, to say the least (Goulet & Young, 1994, p.325).

[20]The Kuranko studied by Jackson live in a village called Firawa, northern Sierra Leone.

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